

More Than Friends by chattrekisses

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Summary: Mike kissed Eleven, and he finds out she didn't understand what it meant, so he tries to repress his feelings for her so not to infringe on her boundaries. Meanwhile Eleven researches the meaning of the mysterious kissing. When she does, she starts to question her feelings for Mike. Does he like her as more than a friend? Does she like him as more than a friend? Pure Mileven fluff.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note: I've watched Stranger Things 2 1/2 times in 24 hours, so I decided to bless the world with fluffy Mileven fanfiction because we desperately need more of it in this world. It takes place after Season 1, but without Eleven going wherever the hell she went, and Nancy and Steve are NOT together. Let me know if any of the characters seem a little OOC, and I'll try to fix it. Please review/favorite/follow if you enjoy, and on with the story.

Eleven was fiddling with Mike's supercom in her fort, only kind of paying attention to the campaign Mike was running in the background. After the events of the Demogorgon, Joyce decided to adopt El, so the girl had somewhere to sleep for real now, not just in a blanket fort in the basement. But Mike kept her fort up anyway.

El liked Joyce, she was nice and she smelled like nutmeg and she taught El how to sound out words. It took El a couple of months before she called Joyce her mom, but the smile on Joyce's face when she did made everything worth it. Jonathan and Will called El their sister as soon as she came to live with them, and it made her very happy. Jonathan liked to show her photos he had taken, most of them were of trees or of Nancy, and Will liked to show her how to draw things, and together they listened to loud music that El didn't understand. But Jonathan and Will liked it, so she would hum along with them. She was happy in her new home, so Mike really had no reason to keep up her fort. He couldn't seem to take it down though, and El was happy about that. She liked Joyce's house, and her room, but the fort Mike made for her made her feel all warm and fuzzy inside. Sometimes she would pretend to fall asleep in it, and Joyce would let her sleepover. And on some nights Mike would come downstairs really late and talk to her while she pretended to sleep.

He talked about Lucas and Dustin and Will, he talked about Nancy and Jonathan and Steve, he talked to her about school and the mouth-breather Troy. But her favorite was when he talked about her. Sometimes he would talk about how scared he was when he thought

she was gone. Sometimes he would talk about how much El meant to him, and how happy he was that she was back for good. He would blush a lot, but it made Eleven feel sparkly inside. She didn't really understand everything that he was saying, but it made her stomach all fluttery, so she didn't mind. It reminded her of when Mike had touched his lips to hers at his school. Nice, but confusing.

"Ew!" Dustin yelled. "Mike! Gross!"

El immediately looked up at the mention of Mike.

"What?" Mike asked.

"That's so disgusting!" said Lucas.

"That's what they're doing and you know it!" Mike shouted.

"I do not want to hear about what my brother and your sister might be doing right now." Will shivered in disgust. "I just want pizza."

"But, Will, then you're going to have to interrupt them kissing in the kitchen!" Mike insisted.

El perked up at the unfamiliar word. "Mike?"

Mike stopped and turned to El. "Yeah, El?"

"What's... kissing?" El asked.

A range of emotions flickered across Mike's face in quick succession: shock, anger, hurt, confusion, and finally embarrassment.

"You... don't know what kissing is?" Mike blushed and stuttered.

"Why don't you show her, Mike?" Lucas teased, puckering his lips.

Mike blushed harder. "I... um..."

Dustin clapped his hands excitedly. "Show her, Mike!"

El tilted her head to the side in confusion. "Mike? What is kissing?"

"Um... a-ask Nancy! Or-or Joyce!" He flushed and sat back in his

chair. "Let's continue the campaign!"

The other boys sighed and sat down. On one hand, they really wanted their OTP to become really, but on the other hand, this was a *really good* campaign. Like, *really good*. And with the way that Mike and El made moon-eyes at each other, they knew it was only a matter of time.

"You feel at ease, having defeated the Demogorgon. You're about to enjoy your feast, when you hear a boom, boom, boom! It's...it's...it's..." Mike smiled.

"What is it?" Dustin asked, on the edge of his seat. All the other boys were watering at the mouth, ready to know what they were going to be up against next.

"It's... where are you going, El?" Mike stopped and looked up at the girl, who had started climbing up the basement stairs.

"AGH!" Lucas shouted in exasperation. "MIKE! WHAT IS IT?"

Mike waved his hand at Lucas dismissively. "El?"

"I'm going to ask Nancy about kissing." said El.

"O-oh. Okay." Mike's voice went a few octaves too high, and the other boys looked at him suspiciously.

El nodded and smiled at Mike, making his heart catch for a moment, and then she ascended the stairs and was out of sight.

Mike waited a moment before thumping his fist down on the table. "Shit. Shit, shit, shit, shit."

"What?" Will asked. "Is everything alright, Mike?"

"No! God, I'm such an idiot..."

"What happened?" Dustin asked.

"Ugh... remember when you and Lucas were getting lunch lady Phylliss's chocolate pudding?" Mike asked.

"No." Will said.

"This was when you were in... um... the uh, bad place." Mike said. Will was still pretty sensitive around the topic of the Upside-Down, and no one wanted to upset him. "Well, uh... El and I were alone together and I, uh... I kissed her."

Dustin's eyes bugged out. "YOU DID WHAT?"

"I kissed her, like a total spaz, and I just know found out she doesn't even know what it means!" Mike groaned and banged his head on the table.

"So, you like my sister?" Will asked. His voice was cautious, yet threatening. He had come to be very protective of her, as El had of him. They really were like siblings.

Mike's face burned and he looked down at the table. "It-it doesn't even matter. She wouldn't understand what love like that even means. I don't want to push her boundaries and make it all awkward between us."

Dustin waggled his eyebrows. "Love?"

"You're in *love* with her?" Will asked, eyes wide in disbelief.

"Sh-shut up!" Mike blushed. "That's not what I said!"

"Um, yes it is. You said," Lucas' voice went high and whiny in an attempt to recreate the forlorn sound of Mike's voice. "*She wouldn't understand what love like that even means!*"

"You're wrong, too. She loves you, man." Dustin smirked.

"No, no, no, she doesn't, guys. She... she doesn't get it, and she isn't going to. And even if she did, she wouldn't like me in that way. We're just friends! Just... friends. Let's just... get back to the game." Mike sighed and pulled out a minifigure, which he placed on the board. "It's a Thessalhydra."

"Damn it!" Lucas yelled. "We're in some deep shit right now!"

Meanwhile, Eleven was in search of Nancy, intent on getting the definition of kissing. She finally found Nancy in the kitchen with Jonathan like Mike had predicted. They were quite close to each other and were leaning in closer, El observed.

"Nancy, what's kissing?" El asked.

"GAH!" Nancy shouted, shooting away from Jonathan. She hadn't realized the younger girl was there. "What's...kissing?"

Jonathan looked at his sister. "Uh... I gotta go. Are you gonna stay here tonight, sis?" El's face lit up and she nodded. "Okay, cool. I'm gonna go get Will. Um.. bye, Nancy." Jonathan awkwardly hugged Nancy, his arms barely touching her. El held in a snicker.

"I'll call you?" Nancy said.

Jonathan smiled. "I'd like that." He hugged El goodbye, and told her to call him if she needed to come home. Then he went to get Will.

Nancy leveled the younger girl with a look. "You want to know about kissing?" El nodded. Nancy sighed. "Okay. Let's talk about it in my room, alright?"

El followed Nancy up the stairs, smiling at all the pictures that lined the walls. She liked the ones with Nancy, but she liked the ones with Mike more. Her favorite was the one where Mike first got his bike. He's smiling, all proud and happy. El liked that bike because she liked to ride on it with Mike, and it always made him smile.

Nancy sat on her bed, and El sat with her. El looked around curiously. She'd been in Nancy's room loads of times, but she still found it fascinating. El frowned though, because one thing was amiss. She pointed at the window, which was closed and locked, the blinds closed tightly. "No Steve?" She asked.

"No Steve." Nancy agreed. "So, why do you want to know what kissing is?"

"Mike and Dustin and Lucas and Will were talking about it. They said that you and Jonathan were kissing." El said.

"They said what? Oh, I am going to *kill* them..." Nancy growled. El looked shocked. "Not really, El. I'm just very mad at them."

"Why?" El asked.

"Because... because kissing is... special. Sometimes secret." Nancy tried to explain. "When you kiss someone, it means you like them."

"Like a brother or sister?" El asked.

"No, no, like... more. Like love. You can kiss someone when you like them, and it's nice. But you can also kiss someone when you love them, and then it's special. Like fireworks and butterflies."

"Was Steve like?" El asked.

"Uh... yeah. Steve was... was just like." said Nancy.

"And Jonathan, Jonathan is love?"

Nancy blushed furiously. "Uh... I don't know. Maybe. I... let's talk about something else."

"How do you kissing?" El asked.

"Well, you put your lips on the other person's lips. Sometimes you open your mouth. Sometimes you use your tongue." Nancy said.

"Like this?" El stuck her tongue out of her mouth and waggled it around.

Nancy laughed. "No, not like that. But you don't have to worry about that. At your age, it's probably just touching lips."

El flashed back to when Mike had touched his lips to her in the cafeteria, when the bad man were after her. "Mike kissed me once." She said.

Nancy looked at El, shocked. "What? Really?" El nodded.

She nodded and looked down at her feet. She liked her shoes, they were pink like Nancy's. "I don't know what it means."

"It means... I think it means he likes you." Nancy smiled.

"I like Mike." El said.

"Well, yes. But I means he likes you as more than a friend."

"Like a sister?" El asked.

"No... more like...um... how do I explain this? Liking someone more than a friend means...that their words mean more to you, you care what they think, you want to impress them. Whenever you're with them, your heart races and your face gets hot. And if they touch you, you feel all tingly. That's liking someone more than a friend."

El frowned. That was exactly how she felt around Mike. Did she... did she like Mike more than a friend?

"But what happens if two people like each other more than friends?" El asked.

"Usually they kiss. It's nice." Nancy smiled to herself.

El thought about Mike, twisting her dress in between her fingers. If she liked Mike more than a friend, and Mike liked her more than a friend, than what did that mean for them? Would they kiss more? El's stomach flip-flopped at the thought. When Mike kissed her before, she didn't know what it meant. Now that she did, could she kiss him?

To say she was confused was an understatement.

But she was also excited.

Author's Note: So ya'll... how'd you like it? I expect that this will be about ten chapters. I'm taking a break on some of my other stories because I'm currently too involved in Stranger Things to do anything else. Let me know what you think in the comments, and I'll see you next time!

Kisses,

Chattre

2. Chapter 2

Author's Note: Thank you for the kind feedback! I went back and realized that the first chapter was riddled with errors (I accidentally published my first draft!), so I went back and fixed it up. Hope you enjoy the second chapter, and please review/follow/favorite if you enjoy! Telling me what I can improve on is super-duper helpful!

El had been lost in her thoughts on Mike and her and love and feelings when Nancy poked her shoulder gently. El looked up at the older girl curiously, wondering what she could want.

"Sorry, El, but, uh... I need to call Jonathan." Nancy said.

"What are you going to call my brother about?" El asked.

"Uh... private things." Nancy held a finger up to her lips conspiratorially. "Secret things."

"Like kissing?" El asked.

Nancy blushed. "Yeah... like kissing. Why don't you go find Mike? He'll put you to bed."

El yawned and nodded, then exited Nancy's room to go find her friend.

"Mike?" She called. She walked back to the stairs. "Mike?"

Lucas and Dustin suddenly blew past her, pulling on their coats. It was the dead of winter, and the world was laced with snow, so they needed protection to brave the cold.

"Bye El!" Dustin smiled at her.

"See you tomorrow!" Lucas said.

"Bye." El said. She then tiptoed carefully down the stairs. "Mike?"

Mike popped out from under the table, holding a dropped minifigure. "Hey, El," He said before continuing to put away his D&D game. "Are you going to stay over tonight?" He asked.

El nodded. "Is... is that okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, of course." He placed the D&D box back on the shelf. "Do you want to watch a movie or something?"

"Star Wars?" El knew that it was Mike's favorite.

He grinned. "Yes! Let's watch Star Wars."

Mike offered her his hand, and she took it giddily. Then he pulled her up the stairs and into the living room. She sat on the couch with her legs tucked under her, still feeling her hand tingling where Mike had held it. She thought about him holding her hand, how it made her feel. Sparkly. Sparkly was the right word. Mike was the only one of the boys who she would hold hands with, and she was sure that if she held hands with the other boys, it wouldn't feel the same. Sparkly. It felt... normal but special all at the same time.

Mike finished setting up the movie and came to sit next to El on the couch. He kept a foot of space between them, which made El feel peculiar. Not happy, but a little sick to her stomach. She wanted to hold his hand again. It confused her a bit. She would have to talk to Nancy more. Was this liking more than a friend?

The movie started and yellow script started to run across the screen on a background of stars. El made a frustrated noise, she couldn't read or understand the words fast enough. Mike understood and paused the movie, reading the prologue out loud to her and explaining words he didn't think she would understand, like *empire* and *starship*. She liked hearing him talk, and knowing that he would show the world to her. it made her feel safe. Safe and sparkly.

It scared El when there were weird monsters or loud glowing sticks, but Mike seemed to anticipate her fear, and he slid his hand into hers and gave her hand a squeeze whenever she jumped. El thought that Princess Leia was pretty, but not as pretty as Nancy. Mike liked Han Solo the best, he kept bouncing in excitement whenever he came on

the screen.

Towards the end of the movie, El scared to feel her eyelids drooping, so she laid her head on Mike's shoulder.

"Uh... El?" He asked.

"Hmm?" She kept her eyes closed. His t-shirt was soft against her cheek, and she could feel his warmth radiating through his shirt.

"N-nevermind." He stuttered, returning his eyes back to the television, a small smile gracing his features. His hand squeezed El's gently, and El went to sleep.

The movie ended and the screen went fuzzy and dark, but Mike didn't want to move. El was breathing softly and her dark eyelashes dusted her cheekbones prettily. She made Mike's heart swell, but he tried to repress the dizzy syrupy-sweet feeling. He couldn't do that to El, couldn't try to change their relationship when she wasn't ready for it. He should be content to just be her friend. But that didn't mean he couldn't secretly relish moments like this one.

"Hey, El?" He tapped her shoulder gently. She only responded by nuzzling her face closer into his shoulder. It was obvious she wasn't going to wake up anytime soon. Sighing, Mike extricated himself, watching her flop over sideways onto the couch.

He smiled down at her, deciding whether or not to leave her there. She frowned and turned over, letting out a noise of discomfort at the hard leather of the couch. That decided it for him. He tucked an arm under her neck and under her knees, then struggled to lift her up. He was only 13 years old after all, he wasn't some ridiculous muscle-builder football player extraordinaire, but he did his best to carry El down the stairs to the fort he made for her.

He stumbled a couple of times, but he didn't fall down the stairs or drop El, so he considered it an accomplishment. He set her down inside her fort, then covered her in a puffy down blanket.

"Good night, El." Mike whispered. "I'm glad you're here." He was careful to be quiet as he walked up the stairs. He didn't want to wake

her.

He went up to his room and laid on his bed, looking up at his ceiling. He tried to clear his head, but his thoughts kept returning to the girl in his basement. It was kind of ridiculous, two weeks ago the mere mention of a girl would bring up one thing in his mind: cooties. Now if he thought of a girl all he could picture was El smiling, El holding his hand, El's head on his shoulder, El's lips on his. It was quite a weird change.

Shaking himself out of his daze, he reached over and grabbed his supercom. He needed some advice.

"Lucas, are you there? Over." He asked.

"Mike, it's late. What do you want?" Lucas' voice was groggy and staticy, and Mike leaned over to check his clock. 12:34. He waited a moment for Lucas to conclude his question, but he didn't.

"Are you done? Over."

"Yes." Lucas said.

"I've told you to say over after you're done talking about a million times! Over."

"Ugh..." Lucas groaned. "What do you want, Mike? Over."

Mike turned over onto his side. "I can't stop thinking about Eleven. Over."

"Ew... Mike..." Lucas whined. "I don't want to hear about how much you *love her*. I just wanna sleep. Over."

"Lucas," Mike's voice was urgent. He knew that his friend got irritable easily, and he didn't want Lucas to randomly stop talking to him, he needed to talk to a friend right now. He wished Dustin was in range, he was always good at listening to problems. But Lucas would have to do, even though he was extremely squeamish around the idea of girls. "I'm not sure what to do about El. Over."

Mike could just sense Lucas' shrug over the walkie talkie. "Just tell

her you like her. Over."

"But Lucas, is she really ready for that? Am I even ready for that? Over." Mike asked.

"If you're not sure, then don't tell her you like her. Over." Lucas said.

"But it's so hard hiding it!" Mike whined. "Over." He added as an afterthought.

"Then tell her! You're making this a lot more complicated than it has to be, Mike. Over."

"You're right, you're right. Sorry for waking you up so late. See you tomorrow, Lucas." said Mike. "Over and out."

"Night, Mike. Over and out." Lucas replied.

Mike set the supercom back on his bedside table and sighed. What was he even going to do? His feelings for Eleven kept complicating things. He wanted everything to go back to normal again, but he knew that wasn't possible. Even when he first saw El in the woods on that fateful rainy night, something inexplicable shifted in him. He immediately wanted to do anything and everything he could to keep her safe by his side.

And now it was winter, and it meant one other thing that couldn't seem to leave Mike's mind: The Snow Ball. Would he still be going with El? They both promised, but they hadn't talked about it since. And if she didn't know what kissing was, then did she also not know what the dance was? The whole ordeal just made Mike feel all sticky and gross and messy and frustrated.

Love was stupid.

And he knew how he felt for Eleven was love. It wasn't just some dumb crush, like the one he had on Princess Leia in Return of The Jedi. This was real, and it sucked because no one would believe him. A thirteen year old in love? That's about as rare as Troy being nice to someone.

Mike knew that El had been through some tough things, and had

suffered because of it. Basic interactions could be quite difficult or confusion to her, because she had never been taught about how to really live. She had gone 12 years without knowing the meaning of "friend", and yet Mike expected her to be able to properly understand love? It was unfair, and he knew it.

So, he would be content with being just being her friend. He would hold her hand, *platonic*ly of course, let her lay her head on his shoulder, again, *platonic*ly, ride his bike with her behind him, please notice the emphasis on *platonic*ly. He would be civil. He would hide his affections as best he could, surviving off of staring at her whenever she wasn't looking and talking to her when she slept.

They would be platonic, like El needed.

Well, El would be platonic.

Mike, on the other hand, wouldn't really.

But he could pretend.

Author's Note: I hope you enjoy this chapter! Your guys feedback is so nice, and it really helps me write faster. So, if you want the next chapter to be out soon, please review/follow/favorite, and I'll see you next time lovelies!

Kisses,

Chattrre

3. Chapter 3

Author's Note: You guys are the nicest things ever! I'm so excited for Season 2, can it be 2017 already? They're filming Season 2 in October... it's October... I'm freaking out a teensy weensy bit. Also, it was Noah Schnapp's birthday a few days ago! He's twelve! I'm so proud of my smol successful children. Anyway, enjoy this chapter, and if you do please review/follow/favorite!

El had come to realize that she disliked mornings.

She woke up in a tangle of blankets and horror. She liked her dreams most of the time. She dreamed about Eggos often and that made her happy, and occasionally she dreamed about the Demogorgon, which made her waking up shaking, tears spilling from her eyes. Tonight though, tonight was different.

Tonight she dreamed about Star Wars. She was Princess Leia in her white outfit and braided hair, and Mike was Han Solo. And he touched his lips to hers and she shivered from the top of her head to the tips of her toes. Then she turned around and her Papa stood there, beckoning her. "Come to Papa, Eleven." He said. "I've missed you." But all that could go through El's head was: bad, bad, bad. She spun around into Mike, but it wasn't Mike. Mike was in the same state that El had found Barb in in the Upside Down, and she looked on in horror as a slug oozed its way out of Mike's mouth, his eyes dull and slack. She screamed and collapsed, looking up again to find her Papa staring down at her. Then Mike stood up to join Papa, and the slug fell out of Mike's mouth landing in a puddle of slime in El's lap. She screamed, and Mike-but-not-Mike smiled, and Papa and Mike said to her, "Don't you love us, El?".

El woke up breathing heavily, clawing at the blankets to have something to hold on to. She heaved, then rubbed at her eyes. Why had she dreamed that? It did a number on her, she felt as if her very bones were shaking. Seeing Mike... like that was certainly disturbing, but was worse was seeing him and her Papa. The more she thought about it, the sicker she felt. There was a time when she thought that she might have loved Papa. Not the same way that she loved Mike

though. Papa was all she knew for so long, and he was kind to her, sometimes. She didn't know any better.

Then she ran away, and she found Mike, and she found out what love, what friendship meant for real. And she knew that she never loved Papa.

But it still scared her. What if Mike was just like Papa? Maybe he wasn't actually good, maybe he wasn't actually her friend. Maybe he wasn't actually someone she could trust. But, really, she did know she could trust him. He always protected her, showed the world to her, made sure she was alright. Papa never did that. Papa hurt her, made her do things she didn't want to. Papa was bad, but Mike, Mike was good.

Eleven left her fort and was about to go upstairs when she saw a pile of clothes on the table where Mike, Lucas, Dustin, and Will would play D&D. She sifted through it curiously, and smiled softly when she realized what it was. The old pink dress of Nancy's that the boys had given her, and some striped tube socks. She picked up the clothes and walked to the bathroom, remembering back to the night where she had first met them all. She had almost changed in front of Mike, Lucas, and Dustin, but they freaked out and Mike took her to the bathroom and tried to explain the meaning of privacy to her. Like before, she kept the door cracked while she changed, she was still frightened like that, no matter how hard she tried not to be.

Privacy was a strange thing. Were her feelings for Mike private? Should they be? Did she want them to be? She remembered her strange dream, should she keep that private too?

Mike was different than her Papa, and El knew that. She knew that she loved Mike, it was a chemical reaction, the feeling that made her heart heavy in her chest and her knees go weak. It was the sensation whenever she caught him looking at her and the smile that would spread like butter on an Eggo over his face would make her heart sing. He made her feel special for all the right reasons.

Should she want him to know? She didn't know if she did, but she did know one thing: she wanted to see him. Maybe seeing him would help her sort out the knot of emotion in the base of her throat.

She finished buttoning up the pink dress, and she ran her hands down the ruched front. Her hair was starting to grow out, it was more of a pixie cut than anything else now. This dress made her think back to when El was looking in the mirror, before they had found Will, and she had lost her wig. She was saddened by her reflection, she felt ugly. "Still pretty?" She asked Mike. "Yeah, pretty. Really pretty." He had said. Then for some reason she had gotten closer and closer to him, it had just felt right, and Mike kept looking at her lips like El looked at Eggos, and then Dustin had opened the door and they jumped apart. El felt strangely disappointed, like she had missed out on something. She had half a mind to be mad at Dustin for ruining the moment, but then she found out that Papa was coming, and she became worried about other things.

Was she trying to kiss Mike in that moment? El wondered.

El's stomach rumbled, interrupting her thoughts. Then all she could think about was Eggos, Eggos, and more Eggos. Mike and feelings could wait, she was hungry.

El walked out of the bathroom and up the stairs, then to the kitchen to find some food. Inside was the hustle and bustle of the school-day morning routine, it was Monday after all. Karen was making scrambled eggs, baby Holly on her hip, Ted was nowhere in sight, but Nancy was there, waiting for the eggs to be finished. El looked around again, but couldn't spot Mike.

"Mike?" El asked.

"Hey!" said a voice from behind her. Mike brushed past her and pulled a box of Eggos from the freezer. "How did you sleep, El?"

"Okay." El thought a moment, then all she could think was *friends don't lie*. "Bad." She corrected.

Mike stilled, his hands still full of waffles to put in the toaster. "Do you... do you want to talk about it?" He asked.

El shook her head, and Mike put the waffles in the toaster. "Okay," He said. "But if you change your mind, tell me." He dusted off his hands as he waited for the Eggos to toast. "Do you want to have a breakfast

picnic with me at school? Jonathan can take you home from there, and we can hang out more."

El grinned and nodded vigorously at Mike, and he laughed. He asked Karen to call Jonathan about picking up El as he retrieved the Eggos from the toaster. Once everything was set, he put the Eggos in a baggie and walked with El to the front door. He grabbed his faded blue jacket and El's new flowered one that Joyce had bought for her, holding them out. He gave her a pleased smile when she took his jacket instead of her own. As she put on his jacket, which smelled just like him, he put on her flowered one. It was a bit too small on him, and the flowers looked ridiculous, but he wore it anyway. It was worth it for him, being able to see her in his clothes and remember back to when they first met.

He slid the packet of waffles into his pocket and took El outside. They got onto Mike's bike, Mike steering, El behind him like usual. She gripped his jacket tightly, her feet automatically going to the wheel hubs, as he took off. El was still a little nervous about riding a bike, but Mike made her feel safe.

El liked seeing all the buildings in the town whizz past her while she rode with Mike. She felt giddy and invincible. She wrapped her arms around Mike's waist instead of their usual position clutching his jacket, and then pressed the side of her face between his shoulderblades. She felt him swallow and his heart speed up, and it made her sparkly.

Mike forced himself to focus on the road in front of him as El clutched him closer than she ever had before. He hoped that she couldn't feel his heart thumping out of control, and he was glad she couldn't see how red his face probably was. Was this what driving intoxicated felt like? He felt dangerously warm.

Too soon they arrived at Hawkins Middle School. Mike had wanted to take the longer route, but then he would have had to skip the picnic with El, and he didn't want to miss it.

After he shackled up his bike, he took El's hand tentatively, his grip loose so she could slide away if she wanted to, and led her over to a small thicket of trees that lined the middle school's entrance.

She sat, and he sat next to her, pulling out the Eggos and handing them to her. He told her about how he and Will were going to use the Heathkit Ham shack at lunch today, and if she wanted to borrow his or Will's walkie talkies, he could try to talk to her. El just listened and munched away at her Eggo, watching Will's mouth curiously.

"Hey, Frogface." came a voice. Mike grimaced, he had hoped he had come early enough to avoid Troy, but apparently luck wasn't on his side today. "Who's this with you?" Troy asked.

Troy regarded Mike and the pretty girl eating a waffle beside him. She looked familiar, but something wasn't clicking. El's new longer hair seemed to disguise her from Troy, enough so that the dumb boy wasn't able to recognize her.

"What's a pretty thing like you doing hanging around Frogface?" Troy asked. "I bet Frogface's sister put you up to this. Why don't you hang out with a guy more your speed." Troy puffed up his chest, his smile smug, he was convinced a pretty girl like El would ditch Mike at the first chance she could.

"Why don't you leave us alone?" Asked Mike. Standing up to Troy was always hard, no matter how often he seemed to have to do it these days. But anything for El.

"What did you say, Frogface?" Troy stepped closer to Mike threateningly.

El stepped between the two boys, glaring at Troy. "Leave," She said. "Mouthbreather."

Troy stood shocked and rather annoyed. On one hand, he wanted to humiliate Mike with his little crush watching, but on the other hand, he got the distinct feeling that he should be afraid of this girl. Luckily, the school bell rang, saving Troy from making any hard decisions.

"I'll see you later." He said before strutting off, James trailing behind him. Who he was talking to, even he didn't know. But he knew it sounded vaguely threatening, and that was all he was going for.

Mike sighed in relief, happy to not have to confront Troy at least for now. He packed up the Eggos and was about to say goodbye to El when he felt something soft touch his cheek. His face burning, he clutched the side of his face where El had kissed him in shock. "Wh-what was that for, El?" He stuttered. Had she really just kissed him unprovoked?

"Thank you for Eggos, Mike." El smiled sweetly.

Mike struggled to swallow. "An-anytime. I'll see you later, okay?"

El nodded, and Mike left, still not really believing that El had kissed him, on the cheek, but whatever, out of her own free will.

El watched Mike go.

She felt sparkly.

Author's Note: Hope you enjoyed this chapter! I had so much fun writing it. Please review/follow/favorite if you enjoy! Just a warning, I might not be able to post for two nights, hopefully I'll be able to post sooner! I'm sorry! See you next time though!

Kisses,

Chattro

4. Chapter 4

Author's Note: Y'all are so nice! I went on a trip and didn't check my email until yesterday afternoon, and then I got all of your kind words and it made my day! Thank you so much! All the love really keeps my writing, so if you want me to update sooner then pretty please follow/favorite/review! I hope you guys enjoy this chapter!

Mike was still buzzing with El's kiss as he ran to his first class, which was science with Mr. Clarke and Dustin. He barely felt his feet touch the ground as he made his way to the classroom. He threw open the door and it banged against the door, making him jump.

"YAH!" Mike yelped.

"Are you alright, Mike?" Mr. Clarke asked.

"Oh, um, I'm fine. The door just... startled me a bit." Mike patted the door awkwardly.

Mr. Clarke gave him a strange look, but luckily Dustin waved him over before Mr. Clarke could question him more.

"Mike!" Dustin yelled. Mike quickly walked over to him as the room filled with people. "Sit here!"

Mike sat in the seat next to Dustin, slamming his books down on the desk, as the other students started to file into the classroom. He didn't open his textbook though, all he could do was tap his foot erratically. He couldn't stop smiling.

"Mike!" Dustin hissed, trying to keep his voice down so Mr. Clarke, who had started the lesson, wouldn't notice. "Are you spacing out? Mike!"

Mike shook himself out of his haze and turned to look at Dustin. "What?"

"What's wrong with you?" Dustin whispered.

"It's nothing!" Mike whispered back. All he wanted to do right now was to slip back into his daydream, into reliving that semi-kiss over and over.

"You can't lie to me, Mike, I know you! What happened?"

"It doesn't matter." Mike said.

"Liar. What happened?" Dustin asked.

"I'll tell you later."

"Tell me now!" Dustin hissed.

"No!" Mike said.

"Come on, Mike, tell me!" Dustin said.

"Mike?" A voice came.

"Fine, fine. She kissed me!" He shouted, then quickly clapped his hands over his mouth, realizing how loud he must have been. Every single head turned to face him simultaneously, all with similar shocked expressions.

"How... nice Mike, but that wasn't the answer I was looking for. The question was how many types of strata are there and what are their names?" Mr. Clarke said.

Mike quickly answered, his embarrassment raising to color his cheeks. He slid a little lower into his desk, wishing he could disappear. Or better yet wishing school was over so he could see El.

"She kissed you? Holy shit!" Dustin whispered.

"On the cheek." Mike mumbled, blushing.

"Still, that's great!" Dustin said. "See, I knew she liked you too!"

Immediately Mike felt crumpled like a tin can someone had stepped on. Did she like him too? For most people, after that the answer would have been obvious. But El wasn't most people. She probably

hadn't understood the meaning that a kiss held. Even a seemingly innocent one on the cheek.

"Ugh." He groaned, and quietly hit his head against the table. He was frustrated, but he didn't see the point in drawing any more unnecessary attention to himself. "She probably doesn't even understand what a kiss even means."

"Mike," Dustin said. "I think you need to give El a little more credit. She understands more than you think, even if she just understands it in a different way than we do."

Mike considered. El really did understand many things deeply, even if she didn't understand all of it. Dustin's words rang true. "Why are you always so right?" Mike asked.

"Nah, I'm not always right, I'm just less of a dumbass than most of you guys, so I always say the obvious and you think I'm right." Dustin smiled.

"Well then." Mike groaned. He slipped back into his daydream, while Dustin returned to the discussion, taking notes on two pieces of paper because he knew Mike wouldn't be paying attention to the lesson today.

In Mike's daydream, when Troy interrupted the picnic, Mike told him off. He called him all the names that he'd been wanting to since Troy started bullying him and his friends. Troy tried to hit Mike but he fought back. Troy couldn't get in a punch, but Mike was on fire, throwing punches and generally being a badass. Then Troy and his cronies ran away scared, leaving Mike alone with El. She smiled at him, told him how brave he was, but he just shrugged. It was nothing, he said. But you saved me, I have to pay you back, El said. Then she kissed him, this time on the lips, and Mike felt the electricity of it course through him.

"Mmm..." He murmured sleepily, still in his daydream.

"Mike?" Said a voice. "Mike? Mike!"

Mike jolted off of his desk, looking up into the eyes of Mr. Clarke.

"Yeah?"

"Are you alright?" Mr. Clarke asked.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fine." said Mike. "Um... can I use the Heathkit Ham shack during lunch?"

"Of course. Any reason why?" Mr. Clarke asked.

"I... promised to try to talk to someone." Mike answered, not seeing the point in lying.

"Would you be referring to the girl who kissed you?" Mr. Clarke raised an eyebrow.

Mike blushed hard. "Uh... um.... Well-"

"You don't have to tell me, I'm just teasing you." Mr. Clarke patted Mike's shoulder, then handed Mike the keys. "There you go. Now, you should run to your next class. You don't want to be late."

"Thanks, Mr. Clarke!" Mike smiled as he gathered up his things and ran to his next class.

Jonathan picked up Eleven 4 minutes and 16 seconds after Mike left. Ever since Hopper taught her about numbers and their relation to time, she counted when she had to wait for something. She was sitting on the curb, counting on her fingers, when Jonathan rolled up in his car. El smiled and skipped over to the car. She loved skipping, when Will got out of the hospital, it was one of the first things he taught her, besides how to make an Eggo by herself. Mike didn't know that she knew how to make one on her own. She kept it a secret because she liked it better when he made them for her. For some reason, they tasted... sweeter.

She wasn't as surprised as she probably should have been when she opened the passenger door and Nancy was there.

"Oh, El, could you sit in the back today?" Jonathan asked.

El nodded and closed the door on Nancy, who was insisting that she

could move to the back instead of El. El knew that Nancy didn't really want to move, she had spotted Nancy's hand inching closer to Jonathan's on the armrest. She sat in the back seat as Jonathan drove her home, watching conspiratorially as Nancy's fingers flickered uncertainly above Jonathan's hand before quickly, like she was trying to sneak up on him, she grab his hand and laced his fingers with hers. He looked at her across the console, surprise written over his face. Nancy looked very pointedly ahead, blushing furiously. Jonathan tucked his chin in, a secret smile on his face.

They were driving down the street to Joyce's house, and the houses zipping by, reminding her of the bike ride with Mike, and then the kiss. El bounced in her seat, trying to smother her giggles with her hand. Jonathan turned his head and looked at her curiously. "Are you alright, El?"

"I kissed Mike." Eleven murmured, just loud enough for Jonathan and Nancy to hear.

"YOU DID WHAT?" Yelled Jonathan, slamming the brakes. The car skidded for a moment, then came to a stop. Both Nancy and Jonathan leaned over the console to look back at her in shock, their fingers still locked together, just much more awkwardly because of their new position.

"Oh my god. Oh my god!" Nancy said. "Really? On the lips?"

Jonathan shook his head. "Dear lord please no." He muttered.

"On the cheek." Said Eleven, blushing.

"Oh thank god." Jonathan said.

"Hey!" Said Nancy. "What, is my brother not good enough for your sister?"

"It's not that!" Jonathan insisted.

"Then what is it?" Asked Nancy.

Jonathan sputtered for a moment before coming up with a response. "They're too young." He said solemnly.

Nancy raised an eyebrow. "Are they now? El, tell Jonathan this isn't the first time you two have kissed."

"Wait, what?" Jonathan said. "You two have kissed before? When?"

"At the last Demogorgon attack." El said.

"You-you're still too young!" Jonathan said.

El frowned and shook her head. "No."

"Jonathan, they're thirteen." Said Nancy, exasperated. "Your brother is too protective of you, Eleven."

"I am a perfect level of protectiveness! And thirteen is too young to kiss."

"Then what would be an appropriate age to kiss?" Nancy leaned a bit closer to Jonathan, fluttering her eyelashes.

"Uh..." Jonathan swallowed uncertainly. "Fifteen?"

"We're older than that." Nancy said.

"Well, yeah..." Jonathan stuttered, burning red.

"Then why haven't you kissed me yet?" Nancy asked.

Jonathan was so red that El was afraid his face was going to burn off.

"Kiss her." Commanded El.

The two teens jolted apart, having completely forgotten that El was in the car with them.

Nancy nervously tucked a piece of hair behind her ear, blushing hard as she realized how ridiculously bold she had just been. "Um... Jonathan? Are we almost there?"

Jonathan started the engine again and drove the two minutes it took to finish the journey to the Byers' house in awkward blush-filled silence.

"I like Mike more than a friend." Eleven announced.

Jonathan groaned. "How do you even know about this stuff?"

"Nancy." El said.

"What?" Jonathan asked. "Nancy!"

"She had questions! I had answers!" Nancy said.

El's eyebrows furrowed. "I don't understand. Is something wrong?" She asked.

"No, no, it's fine. You would have learned about it anyway, but... I don't know. You aren't as little as I wish you were. You and Will are getting too old to protect all the time." Said Jonathan. "But that doesn't mean I can't try!"

They pulled up into the driveway, and Jonathan stopped the car.

"Chief Hopper will be here to practice math with you in an hour. Will you be okay alone?" Jonathan asked.

The first month that El had come to live with them, she and Will both couldn't be left alone in the house. They saw the Demogorgon in every shadow, heard his strange gurgling in every little creak of the old house. Now they both were fine with being alone, but Joyce and Jonathan still checked to see if it was alright every time they left them by themselves.

El nodded and pushed open the car door. Jonathan waited in the driveway as she went up to the house and unlocked the door with the key she wore. It was on a pretty pink ribbon that Mike had gotten Nancy to give her. El loved it to pieces because it was pretty and it reminded her of Mike.

Once she got inside El locked the door behind her and went straight to the window. She liked to watch people drive away for some reason, it gave her a sense of closure.

She watched as Jonathan started the car, and then Nancy said something. He frowned and turned off the ignition. El could feel him

mustering his courage, then he gently touched the side of Nancy's face. El could see the surprise in Nancy's eyes, but she didn't pull back. In fact, she leaned closer into Jonathan. Jonathan swallowed once, then pressed his lips firmly against Nancy's.

Knowing they couldn't hear her, El clapped her hands and squealed excitedly. They both seemed to melt into the kiss, which quickly grew more heated. Jonathan leaned back and Nancy crawled forward, but the kiss ended abruptly when Nancy's knee hit the horn, releasing a startling honk. Both teens jumped away from each other, then looked at each other and exchanged a good-natured laugh. Nancy grabbed Jonathan's hand again, and Jonathan brought their entwined hands up to his lips, brushing his lips against her knuckles gently. Nancy blushed and Jonathan re-started the car, and they drove off to school. (Author's Note: Haha they didn't drive to school. Innocent lil' El thinks they did though. I might have to write some Jancy smut to go with this lol)

El walked to her room. It used to be Will's but everyone had insisted she should have her own room, so Will and Jonathan now shared. Sometimes though Will would sneak into her room at night and teach her how to play D&D. It still confused her, but she couldn't wait to surprise Mike when she was able to finally play with him and everyone else. El loved her brothers. She really did.

Not the way that she loved Mike though. She loved Mike more than a brother, more than a friend. She loved Mike more than she loved Eggos, and wanted him to know. She wanted him to know like Jonathan wanted Nancy to know he loved her. She wanted him to kiss her again, she wanted to hold his hand, she wanted to go to the Snow Ball with him. She wanted to feel sparkly forever.

But how would she find out if he wanted to feel sparkly too?

Author's Note: Thank you guys for being so patient and supportive, I hope you enjoy this nice long chapter. Please review/follow/favorite if you did, and I'll see you next time!

Kisses,

Chattre

5. Chapter 5

Author's Note: You guys make my heart bounce with your sweet reviews. I love y'all! Please review/follow/favorite if you enjoy this chapter, and on with the story!

"El?" A knock on the front door accompanied the disembodied voice.
"It's Hopper."

El went to the door and opened it carefully. Hopper stood there, carrying an extremely distressed eighth grade Math textbook and a water-stained yellow pad of paper. Hopper hugged El awkwardly, the papers digging into her spine. El didn't mind though, she liked Hopper. He was like a father to her.

Hopper kind of saw El as a second chance to have a daughter, and he wasn't planning on making any mistakes this time. "Do you want to work on subtraction today?"

El's eyes sparkled as she nodded yes. She liked math, and she especially liked math with Hopper. Math was factual, it was straightforward. It made sense and it was always honest. El liked English too, but words could lie in ways that numbers couldn't.

"Okay, good." Hopper smiled. He sat across from El at the dingy dining room table, flipping the pad of paper to face El. He thumbed open the textbook to a dog-eared page on subtraction. He raised an eyebrow at El. "You got a pencil, kid?"

El stood up abruptly and left to find a pencil. She tried, but she couldn't seem to seek out one, so she grabbed a green crayon of Will's to write with. She sat back down across from Hopper, who made a face at the writing utensil she chose but didn't say anything.

"Do you remember how to write a ten?" Hopper asked.

El nodded and drew a messy ten one the first line of the paper. She messed up on the zero though, so she ended up having to fill it in.

"Your zero looks like a cabbage." Observed Hopper. El stuck her tongue out at Hopper petulantly, a gesture Dustin had taught her. He laughed good-naturedly. "I'll bring you a pencil next time. May I?" He asked, reaching for the crayon. El handed it to him, and he took the pad of paper as well. He drew a dash under and to the left of the ten, his fingers cramped together as he tried to write with the small instrument. El had to suppress a giggle. Hopper gave the crayon and the paper back to El. "Write a five under the ten, and a line under that."

El did.

"Do you know what the answer to that is?" Hopper asked. El hesitated then shook her hand. She hated not knowing, but she knew that what she didn't understand she should ask about. Hopper pointed to the ten. "Do you know what that is?" El nodded. "Can you show me on your fingers?" El held out ten fingers. "Okay, now take away ten of them." El counted out five fingers, putting them down as she went. "How many is that?"

"Five." El answered proudly.

"Yes!" Hopper smiled. He scribbled another problem on the paper. "Can you do this one?"

That continued on for a while, El counting out the numbers then subtracting them, Hopper writing more problems for her to do. Until El's stomach grumbled loudly, loud enough for Hopper to hear.

He chuckled. "It's time for lunch, isn't it?" He said.

"What time is it?" El asked.

"Uh, 11:56." Hopper answered.

El pushed out of her chair quickly, the legs scraping against the floor. "I have to go."

Hopper stood, immediately concerned. "Why? And where?" He asked.

"Mike. He's going to be on the walkie talkie at lunch." El said.

"And what does he want to talk to you about?" Hopper asked, a warning edging into his voice. He was very protective of El, perhaps even more so than Jonathan or Will or Joyce.

El did the safest thing she could think of: she merely shrugged as a response.

"Well, I'll try to make lunch, but I promise you I won't be very good at it. You'll probably be eating Eggos." Hopper sighed, knowing the shrug was all the information El would be willing to divulge. "Tell me when you're down talking with... Mike."

El nodded and ran to Will and Jonathan's room, grabbing the walkie talkie from underneath Will's bed. She turned it to the right channel (channel six, the boys had drilled that into her head; if she ever needed to contact them it was always channel six.), and waited for Mike's voice. She set the walkie talkie on the bed and bounced nervously. The springs of the mattress voiced their disapproval, but El couldn't stop moving. For some reason she was scared that Mike not keep his promise, but then she realized he always did to the best of his ability.

When El came back for good, Mike fought to have her stay at his house, but Karen insisted that three kids was more than enough, and that she couldn't take in a fourth. Joyce offered to give El a home, even though Hopper wanted to take her in instead. She insisted that El would need a mother, and that she really wanted to have another girl in the house. So it was decided that El would stay with the Byers. Mike was still angry, he sulked and complained about it for months on end, until his mother snapped and told him that El couldn't possibly ever stay with them, not matter how much he whined. He slept over at the Byers' that night, and he apologized, tears in his eyes, to El while she was pretending to sleep for not being able to keep his promise to have her live with him. El had wanted to comfort him, but she hadn't known how back then.

"El?" A scratchy voice came. "Are you there? Over."

El quickly picked up the walkie talkie. "Mike. I'm here. Over."

"How are you?" He asked.

"Hopper taught me subtraction today. I'm going to have Eggos for lunch." She told him.

"That sounds nice." El could hear Mike's smile on the other end. A burst of static and muffled conversation came from the other end. All El could make out was: "El... kissed him?" "yeah... he likes... snow ball." "...do you think... said yes?" "Maybe."

"Is there other people there?" El asked.

"Yeah, Dustin and Lucas and Will and Mr. Clarke. Say hi everyone." Mike said.

"Hi!" Lucas, Dustin, and Will chorused.

"Hello, Eleanor." Said Mr. Clarke. He still thought that El was Eleanor, Mike's second cousin from Sweden. El found it strange that they had to lie, but the boys had insisted so El went along with it.

Still, she felt a little disappointed that it wasn't just Mike. "Oh. I thought we could talk alone." Pouted El.

"Oh. Oh!" said Mike. "Well, they can leave, right guys?"

"Hey, we wanna talk to El too!" Protested Dustin.

"They can leave. Right?" Mike hissed.

"Jesus, fine. We can leave you two lovebirds alone." Said Dustin, herding Lucas, Will, and Mr. Clarke out of the room.

El heard the click of the door locking and Mike sucking in a breath. "What did you want to talk about, El?" He asked.

El twisted the hem of her dress anxiously. "I don't know. How's school?"

Mike considered. "Well, I have a science test on Tuesday, and Thursday is this big football game, but I'm gonna start a new campaign with the guys that day, and... on Friday is the Snow Ball."

"The Snow Ball?" El asked. She flashbacked to the first time Mike had

kissed her, in the cafeteria after asking her to the Snow Ball. A cheesy school dance, he had said, that you go with someone who is not your friend and not your sister, but he never told her who exactly you go with. He had gotten flustered, and then he had kissed her and she had forgotten about what he was talking about. "That's the one with cheese?" She asked.

"Wait, what?" Mike sounded confused.

"The Snow Ball. You called it a cheesy school dance. There is cheese?" She asked.

"No, no, no. Cheesy means... stupid, corny. Dorky. You know, stuff like that." He tried to explain.

"Why do you want to go to a dance that is stupid?" El asked.

"Are you... are you talking about when I invited you to the Snow Ball?" Mike asked tentatively.

El nodded, then realized he couldn't see her. "Yes."

"You... you really want to go?" Mike was still hesitant.

"Promise." El said.

"That's... that's awesome! That's really great!" Mike sounded happy, but surprised.

"Why are you surprised?" El asked. "We promised."

"Well, I wasn't sure you knew what a dance was when you agreed to go with me... you know what a dance is, right?"

El decided to answer honestly. "No."

El could just hear Mike's face fall, the enthusiasm draining from his tone. "Oh."

"Will you explain to me?" El asked.

"You know what El, I think I... I gotta go, El. I have class." Said Mike.

"Oh-okay, Mike. See you later?" Said El, hopeful.

"Sure. Bye. Over and out." Mike said. His voice was deliberately devoid of emotion, a clean slate. Something was wrong.

"Bye, Mike. Over and out." El said. The line turned to static, and El felt hollow.

Had she done something wrong? Mike had acted so cold and distant when she admitted that she didn't know what a dance meant. Had she hurt his feelings? That was the last thing she wanted to do. She could tell that the Snow Ball was important to Will, and she felt like she had done something wrong to make him feel sad about it. It made her sad.

El couldn't help the tears that spilled out of her eyes, falling onto the walkie talkie like salted raindrops. She felt horrible, but she didn't understand why. What had she done wrong?

Could Mike forgive her?

Author's Note: Mike will redeem himself, I promise! Please review/follow/favorite if you enjoyed, and see you next time lovelies!

Kisses,

Chattré

6. Chapter 6

Author's Note: I hope y'all like this chapter! Please review/follow/favorite if you enjoy, and I'll see you at the end!

Mike left the Heathkit Ham shack room, walking stiffly and quickly towards the bathroom. He couldn't help but sniff and try to hold back tears and he walked. He passed Will, Lucas, and Dustin. Dustin and Lucas gave him a strange look, but Will caught Mike's arm.

"Are you okay, Mike?" Will asked, his eyebrows creasing with concern.

Mike ripped his arm out of Will's grip. "I'm *fine*, Will."

Mike knew he was being harsh, but he needed to have a good cry right now, and he certainly wasn't going to do it in the middle of the middle school hallway. He was bullied enough without people calling him a crybaby.

He sped up, running toward the bathroom. He could hear Will excusing himself from the other boys and following after him, but Mike hoped that Will would leave him alone. He burst through the bathroom door, peered around quickly to make sure no one was there, then locked himself in the nearest stall. He leaned his head against the wall and he broke the dam holding back the tears in his eyes. They rolled down his cheeks in fat droplets, and he hated himself for it. For crying, for being so *stupid*, so stupidly *hopeful* for thinking that El might have understood and wanted to be with him, even for just a cheesy school dance.

Mike heard the door for the bathroom open and he forced himself to stop sniffling for a second. "Mike?" Mike immediately recognized the voice as Will's.

"Will, what are you doing in here?" Mike asked.

"You're crying. What happened?" Will paced in front of the mirrors, and Mike could see him through the crack in the stall door.

"I do-don't want to talk about it." Mike choked out. The tears were coming back, and Mike was afraid he wouldn't be able to hold them back long enough for him to convince Will to leave.

"Mike, don't do that. Don't lie. Tell me what's wrong." Will insisted.

"I...I asked El to the Snow Ball, and she said yes." Mike said.

Will stopped pacing. "Is that a bad thing?"

"Well... no. But she... she..." Mike felt a tear slide down his cheek. "She doesn't even know what the Snow Ball is, let alone what it means."

"Oh, Mike," Will said. "Exactly."

"What?" Mike's voice was shaky and confused.

"Come on, Mike. You aren't this dense. Of course she doesn't know what the Snow Ball is, she doesn't even know what a falafel is. It doesn't matter that she doesn't know what the Snow Ball is, it matters that she said yes."

"What are you talking about?" Mike asked. Will sighed.

"Mike, remember when El first came back, and we tried to get her to eat chicken?" Will said.

Mike's eyebrows furrowed. "Yeah."

"And El wouldn't touch it at all, she refused to eat anything but Eggos that you made her?" Will said. "And everyone thought that she was getting too skinny, that she needed to eat something besides Eggos, so we had you talk to her?"

"I told her she should try to eat something else, even if your mom is..."

Will laughed and continued Mike's train of thought. "A rubbish cook. So she tried everything, because you asked her too, and she liked it. Maybe not as much as Eggos though." Mike chuckled and wiped at his tears with his sleeve. "I probably shouldn't be telling you this,

but... El can make her own Eggos, Mike."

Mike opened the stall door and peered at his friend in confusion.
"What?"

"I taught her how to make her own Eggos the first week she came to live with us. I'm teaching her how to play D&D right now. She wants to surprise you and be able to play with us. Mike, she's working so hard to please you. Mike, do you think if Dustin or Lucas or I asked her to the Snow Ball, she would say yes?"

"That's-that's different!" Mike sputtered.

"Yeah, it is. But why? Why would she accept your invitation, but not mine?" Will asked.

"She..." Mike looked at Will, feeling very dizzy all of a sudden.
"She..."

"She only says yes to you, Mike. Why is that?" Will asked.

Mike leaned against the stall door, sliding down it to sit on the floor. He held his head in his hands, feeling like it was going to crack under the pressure. "She... she likes me?"

Will sighed. "Mike, El likes everyone. She likes you differently."

"She likes me... more than a friend?" Mike looked up at Will, trying to process everything.

"Closer." Will said. "She loves you, Mike."

Mike did a double take. "Wha-what?"

"She may not know what love is, but love isn't something you need to know, it's something you *feel*." Will said. "And everyone with eyes knows you two love each other."

"Wha... what am I supposed to do, Will?" Mike asked.

"Well, I'd start by apologizing to Eleven." Will said.

"What do you mean?" Mike asked.

"If you're crying, Mike, I can only imagine the state my sister is in. And when Hopper and Jonathan get wind of this... well, I'd hate to be you. I think you should talk to her, be honest with her. About everything. It's the best thing to do, be honest." Will said.

"I'll... I'll go see her right after school." Mike said.

The bathroom door slammed open, and Troy and James stood there sneering. "Go see who? Your little girlfriend from this morning?" said Troy.

Mike stood up stiffly, Will standing next to him, arms crossed in an attempt to be threatening. "You leave her alone." Mike spat.

Troy peered at Mike more closely. "Have you been *crying*?" James snickered at that. "Did your little girlfriend break up with you or something? I may have to pay her a visit then, comfort her during this... *hard* time."

"I said leave her alone, Troy." Mike said.

"I don't think so. Your *cousin* isn't your property, Wheeler. She can go with whoever she wants. And I have a feeling that will be me later today" Troy sneered.

"She isn't my cousin, Troy. Or my property. And she doesn't want to go anywhere with the likes of you." Mike said.

"We'll see about that." Troy said.

Will mustered his courage to sputter out, "L-leave my sister alone!"

Troy raised an eyebrow. "Your sister? She's much too pretty to be related to a fag like you."

Will stepped back like he had been hit, his hurt shining in his eyes.

"Don't call him that." Mike defended.

"What, a fag?" Troy laughed.

Will shranked onto himself more, stepping behind Mike, a hot tear sliding down his cheek.

"I said, don't call him that!" Mike stood in front of his friend, prepared to defend him at all costs. Mike could tell that Will hated that he had started crying, he hid his face between Mike's shoulder blades, and Mike could feel Will's tears soak into his shirt.

"Or what?" Troy asked hauntingly.

Mike couldn't think of anything to threaten Troy with, and he was silent for too long so Troy started to laugh at him.

"Aw, Frogface is trying to protect the faggot and the faggot's little sister." Troy said.

"Do you think that the girl is a faggot too?" James asked. Mike fumed silently.

Troy made a face. "Maybe... I can fix that though." He smirked assuredly.

Mike had had enough. "Stop talking about my friends like that." He insisted.

"Why should I?" Troy asked. "It's not like you can even-" Troy's train of thought was interrupted by Mike's fist colliding with his face.

Confusion then anger flashed across Troy's face, and then he swung, hitting Mike in the stomach. Mike doubled over with a sharp exhale, clutching his stomach. Troy stooped and hit Mike in the mouth, and his lower lip split and started to bleed. Mike ducked back and wiped at his lip, smearing the blood across his chin and up to his cheekbone. He held up his fists, glaring at Troy.

Will shook Mike's shoulder anxiously. "Mike. Mike, come on. Let's just go."

"No, Will, I'm tired of just letting him walk all over us," Mike insisted. "He shouldn't be able to talk about any of us like that, especially not El."

"Elle? Is that your sister's name, faggot?" Troy asked.

"Shut up!" Mike yelled, running toward Troy. The other boy was caught off guard, and Mike tackled Troy to the floor, locking his legs around the other boy's to keep him on the ground. Then Mike started to punch Troy, still pinned beneath him.

"Mike!" Will yelled, grabbing Mike's arms and trying to haul him off of Troy. "Stop it! He's not worth it!"

James joined in, trying to pull Mike off of Troy. "Hey, Wheeler, leave him alone! He's had enough!"

Finally they succeeded in getting Mike off of Troy. Troy stayed sprawled on the tiled bathroom floor, in a state of shock, nose bleeding slightly. Mike noticed the trickle of blood and it reminded him of Eleven. He knew that he couldn't continue with school, he had just gotten into a fight, and if Troy told on him (and he would), Mike would be in deep shit. His mom would probably ground him for a month, and then he wouldn't be able to make it up to El and he'd lose his chance to maybe, just maybe, convince her to go to the Snow Ball with an idiot like him.

"Will, I'm gonna leave, okay?" Mike said, stomping out of the bathroom. He stopped to retie his shoe while Will balked.

"You're ditching?" Will asked, confused.

"Yeah. You know my mom will flip if she hears I got into a fight, and I need to apologize to El. Could you tell the rest of the guys where I went?" Mike asked.

Will swallowed, clearly uncomfortable with aiding Mike in ditching, but he knew it was for a good cause. "Okay, okay, I'll... I'll do it."

"Thanks so much." Mike said, patting his friend on the back. "I'll radio you later, let you know what happened."

Will nodded, and Mike took off. He was planning to get his bike and sneak around the edge of the school, in the trees. Hawkin's Middle wasn't the most secure campus, so Mike knew he could ditch with nothing tarnishing his perfect plan. Except, of course, the inevitable

absences in the rest of his classes for the day, which would obviously be reported. Mike tried to push that out of his mind though, that problem was for future Mike. Present Mike just needed to sneak off campus unseen.

Will headed toward Lucas and Dustin's lockers, which were right next to each other. Sure enough, they were there, biding their time before the next class started.

"Guys!" Will said.

"Hey, Will!" Dustin smiled. "What's up?" His lisp snuck in with every word, but Will found it endearing rather than annoying like most of his peers.

"Mike... he ditched." Will said.

Lucas' eye's bugged out. "He did what?"

"You know how he was talking to El? Well, he messed up really bad and ran to the bathroom, you saw that, so I went to talk to him and he was crying, and then Troy came in and called me a... faggot," Will shuffled his feet in discomfort. "And he talked about El in a really... just gross way, so Mike punched him and they got in a fight and Mike *won*, and then he knew Troy would tell on him so he left school to talk to El." Will finished, panting a bit from his run-on sentence. The other boys looked shocked.

"Well, what's he gonna do?" Dustin asked.

Will shrugged. "I don't know. Apologize to El, I guess."

"Not about that, about the rest of his classes?"

"I don't know. He ditched, so he's gonna be counted as missing from 'em. We could try to find a way to cover up that Mike ditched, but I don't know how we could do that." Will said.

The other boys looked at Will in horror, and Will realized that someone had come up behind him during the course of his explanation and heard the entire thing. He turned slowly and came

face-to-face with Mr. Clarke.

"Mike ditched?" Mr. Clarke asked, voice leave and eery calm.

The boys nodded, shock-still and terrified for themselves and for Mike.

"Is it because of that girl, Eleanor?" asked Mr. Clarke.

They nodded again.

"She isn't his cousin, is she?" Mr. Clarke said. "Mike, he really likes this girl?"

"Yes. He really does like my sister." Will said.

"Your sister?" Mr. Clarke raised an eyebrow. "That's interesting. Well, I can help."

"Wait, what?" Lucas asked. "You... want to help Mike ditch?"

Mr. Clarke raised his finger and wagged it. "Just this once! If he's ditching, then she must mean a lot to him."

"She does." Dustin insisted. "She means the world to him." Dustin made a face. "It's weird."

Mr. Clarke laughed. "Alright, now you should all go to class. I'll cover for Mike in the rest of his classes today, tell the teachers that he's helping me with a project or something."

"Bye, Mr. Clarke!" said Lucas and Dustin as they walked away to class.

"Thank you for helping Mike, Mr. Clarke." Will beamed up at Mr. Clarke before heading to class too.

Mr. Clarke smiled and thought of Mike. He hoped that Will's sister was worth it, and he knew that if Mike liked her, she probably was.

Author's Note: Love you guys so much! I hope you liked this

chapter, and please review/follow/favorite if you did, it makes me post faster!

Kisses,

Chattré

7. Chapter 7

Author's Note: Hi everyone! Hope you enjoy this chapter! Just to let you know, I will probably be unable to update next week because I am a part of my school's play (costume crew, so not that impressive, but still a commitment!) and will be staying until nine everyday, and still have to do my homework! So... I will try my best everyone.

El had stopped crying some time ago, when Hopper had came in to see what was wrong. His eyes had gone wide in fright at the sight of the girl curled up in under her sheets, tears streaking down her cheeks. Immediately he was at her side, asking her what was wrong. All she could do was sob and blubber, and Hopper held her until her tears ran dry. "What happened, El?" Hopper asked. El could only manage to whisper *Mike* over and over again until she fell asleep.

When she woke up, Hopper had made her Eggo's to try to comfort her, but they were tasteless and bland in her mouth. She thought about subtraction and about Mike, wondering about what she had done to make him so cold, and wishing she knew how to fix it. She finished her second Eggo and picked up her pencil, then shakily wrote something on the pad of paper.

Eleven - Mike = ?

She let a tear stain the paper before pushing back from the table and throwing away the rest of her meal. She wasn't hungry, she felt... empty inside. Hollow. Hungry in a way even Eggo's couldn't fix.

She missed Mike desperately. She had seen him just this morning, had the courage to kiss him on the cheek, they ate Eggo's together and they had tasted sweet then. Now she was confused and her heart felt sore and she was tired. Emotionally exhausted, really.

She decided she could sleep more. She walked back to her room and slipped under the covers, instantly gliding into dreamland. Hopper came to check on her and looked sadly at her sleeping form. This was a first for her, her first time being hurt by a boy. Hopper was trying

hard not to feel like a bad father for not being able to protect her from this. Mike was a good kid, Hopper knew that, but that didn't mean he wasn't pissed at Mike for hurting El, even if he didn't know what Mike had done.

Hopper figured that Mike would come to apologize, at least he would if he knew what was good for him, but he wouldn't be here until at least school was over. Hopper reached into his jacket and pulled out a pack of smokes. He flipped open the container and expertly tapped out a cigarette, then placed it between his lips. He returned the pack to his pocket and then lit his cigarette. He smiled at the lighter fondly, he had "lost" it for a week, and El and Will had returned it to him covered in stickers. His favorite was the waffle one, El's eyes lit up whenever she saw it, even if it was the wrong shape. Stupid square waffle stickers. Waffles were supposed to be round.

Hopper puffed on his cigarette and thought about the one person who couldn't seem to leave his mind these days: Joyce. She was making him even more of a mess then he already was. Of course she would make him even more of a wreck, she was a wreck herself. Hopper found himself making more and more excuses to come over to the Byers' house these days just so he could see Joyce. They would make dinner together on weekends, but they both were equally terrible cooks, and together their meals were even more shitty because they were too busy avoiding the implications of their obvious tension around one another to try to make a decent meal. Jonathan would end up subtly covering their meager attempts in a perfectly crafted sauce or side dish.

Really, there was no reason for Hopper to be there most of the time. He, of course, considered El like a daughter to him, so naturally he wanted to check up on her, but he didn't need to come to the Byers' house nearly have the times he did. Joyce was a perfectly capable mother, and El was in great hands, but Hopper didn't want to face his affections for Joyce head on, not just yet. Jonathan, that cheeky shit, realized that Hopper and Joyce's feelings weren't exactly platonic early on, and he kept El and Will away from Joyce and Hopper as much as he could. Hopper was grateful, really, for the extra time alone with Joyce, but he was also concerned. Was he really that obvious in his affections? And if so, why hadn't Joyce realized yet?

Hopper's life felt like the plot of a bad fanfiction (**Author's Note: Hahaha it's not bad you lil shit**), and it made him sick to his stomach. He moved out to the country to have a mundane life, which had obviously not ended up happening. The least the universe could do was make his life exciting like an Indiana Jones film, not like the bad preteen romcom it was becoming.

Hopper was jolted out of his thoughts when he heard a knock on the door. "What in the hell?"

He tapped the excess ash off of his cigarette and then went to check the door. He swung it open and there Mike, slightly sweaty and panting, blood smeared across his face and his jaw bruising slightly, stood.

"What the hell happened to you, kid?" Hopper asked, gazing at Mike's beaten-up appearance.

"I... uh... got in a fight." Mike struggled for breath. "Is El here?"

"A fight?" Hopper took a drag and raised an eyebrow at Mike. "Shouldn't you be in school?"

"Some... some people are more important than school. Is... is El here?" Mike pleaded.

Hopper stayed silent, blocking the doorway with his large frame.

Mike sighed. "I know I messed up big time, Hop- Chief Hopper. I'm here to apologize. I was being stupid, and I hurt her, and I am so sorry for that. Please, please, give me the chance to apologize to her. Please."

Hopper sighed and moved out of the way, allowing Mike to step into the house. "She's sleeping in her room." He said curtly.

"Thank you." Mike smiled gratefully and headed toward El's room.

"Hey, Mike?" Hopper stopped him. "You do know that skipping school is called truancy. Technically, I should report you for this."

Mike swallowed. "Whatever happens, El is worth it." He said, his

voice a little shaky with fear, but still sure of his decisions.

Hopper waved his hand at Mike dismissively. "Relax, kid, I won't report you. This time. Don't do it again though."

"Thank you, Chief." Mike nodded and walked up to El's door. He sucked in a deep breath and knocked lightly. "El?" He whispered. No response came, so he eased open the door to find El lying in her bed, asleep.

He was careful to keep his footfalls soft as he walked to her sleeping form on the bed. He smiled down at her, tears pricking in his eyes. He sniffed and eased himself down so he was perched at the edge of her bed.

"I'm sorry, El, for being mean. I was scared. I still am scared. I'm terrified, really, that I'll hurt you or ask too much of you. You mean the world to me, El, and I... I can't bear the thought of losing you again." Mike whispered.

El sighed and turned over, blinking the sleep out of her eyes. "Mi-Mike?" She asked sleepily, reaching her hand out for Mike's.

Mike grasped her hand, smiling down at her. "I'm here, El."

"Wh-what happened to you?" El asked.

Mike chuckled. "I got into a fight with a mouthbreather. Don't worry though, El. This time I won."

El sat up, rubbing at her eyes. "Wh-what about school?" She stuttered sleepily.

"Don't worry about it, El. All that matters is—" Mike started.

"Are you mad at me?" El interrupted him, doe eyes looking up at Mike, full of sadness and confusion.

"No, no, no, no. I'm not mad at you, El. I don't think that's even possible." Mike said.

El yawned and scooted closer to Mike under the blankets. Mike froze.

El's hip was touching his though the layers of blankets, but it still made him feel electric. El leaned her head onto Mike's shoulder and nuzzled closer to his, eyelids fluttering, still not fully awake.

She was so beautiful it made Mike's heart hurt. Her long eyelashes dusted her high cheekbones, her lips were tinted pink like a flower, and her hair, which had started to grow out into a stylish pixie cut, was tickling his neck and it made him want to sneeze. She looked so sweet and delicate and innocent while she slept, like something Mike needed to protect. The thought was ridiculous though, El could throw him across the room without even lifting a finger and they both knew it.

But now, she was in the peculiar place between awake and asleep that warranted Mike's thoughts of protecting her. She was not quite yet fully aware, but aware enough to function independently. El took a deep inhale and exhaled loudly, blowing out a breath that smelled like warm milk. And that's how Mike realized how close together they were.

Mike's lips were inches from El's, and it was tempting, so tempting. All he wanted to do was lean in and press his lips against hers, even just for a moment. She made his heart swell and sent sweet shocks down his spine, and all he wants to do was show her that in a way his words failed to. But he wouldn't push her, he wouldn't kiss her.

But then El did something Mike didn't expect.

She kissed him.

And nothing was ever the same again.

Author's Note: Haha cliffhanger, I wonder how Mike will react! Have fun suffering until I post next!

Kisses,

Chattré

8. Chapter 8

Author's Note: I'm so sorry for taking so long to update! Tech week really kicks your ass. But I hope you enjoy this chapter, and follow/favorite/review if you do! XOXO and see you at the end lovelies!

El looked through her eyelash-shaded eyes at Mike, who was memorizing the lines of her face unabashedly, assuming she was asleep. Per usual, she wasn't. The way he was looking at her made her feel so *sparkly*, so peculiar and fizzy and giddy and full of anticipation. She wanted, for some strange reason, to close the gap between them and touch her lips to his for just a second to see if it would relieve the butterflies in her stomach.

So, having no concept of personal space or boundaries, El did just that. She pressed her lips against Mike's, and his eyes shot open in shock. He didn't pull away though, no matter how much it felt like his life was flashing before his eyes. No, he closed his eyes and kissed El back, relishing in her soft lips. El thought Mike tasted of peppermint, and he was even more delicious than the Eggos he made her. Kissing Mike was like learning how to breath. It was necessary, and then after you tried it for the first time you couldn't go without it or you would die. As soon as she kissed him, she knew that this was not something she was going to give up, not that she wanted to.

She pulled back from his lips to breath and he looked down at her with hooded eyes. Suddenly Mike scrambled back from El, eyes wide and darting around. "Wh-why did you do that?" He asked. Not in a mean way, but in a shocked way. Like he couldn't believe that this was reality. El felt her cheeks get hot and she shrugged shyly. Mike swallowed thickly, his face red. "You... you can't just do that for no reason, El."

El sat a little straighter. "Why not?"

"I... um..." Mike stuttered. "You... you just can't!"

El frowned. "You kissed me."

Mike stepped back, blushing harder. "Well... um... yes..."

"Why is that okay then?" El tilted her head to the side, a little confused.

"I... I had a reason!" Mike said.

"What was it?" El asked.

"Uh..." Mike turned so red El became genuinely worried for his wellbeing. "I... it doesn't matter!" Mortified, he waved his hands frantically, trying to dismiss the subject.

El fisted her hands in her skirt. She wanted to know what Mike's reason was desperately, but she didn't know how to ask him to tell her. "Oh, okay."

Mike bit his lip, catching how disappointed El sounded when he refused to tell her why he had kissed her. *Kissed her...* All Mike could think of now was El's lips on his out of her own drive and he could feel his temperature spiking from the memory.

"Mike?" El asked.

"Hm?" He responded, looking over at her.

"Will you tell me what a dance is now?" She was hesitant, not wanting to make him run away again.

His expression melted into an easy smile. He was still nervous that El might run away scared at the implications of going to a dance with him, but Will's words and El's kiss were making him dizzy with careful confidence. "Okay, El."

El smiled and moved into a cross-legged position, leaning on her elbows intently.

"A dance is like..." Mike trailed off, thinking of how to explain it to El. "It's a place where you dress up and go with someone you like to listen and move along to music."

"Move along to music?" El asked, confused.

"Well, there's different types of dancing," Mike said. "But at a dance you kinda just bop around or slow dance."

"How do you *bop around*?" El asked.

"Um... you kinda just move." Mike demonstrated by miming nodding his head back and forth and bouncing his arms. El copied his movements to some degree of success, giggling all the while.

"And what is slow dance?" El asked. Mike flushed a bit and motioned for her to stand up.

"Well, um..." Mike started nervously. "I put my hands here," He set his hands on her hips. "And you put your hands here." Mike shrugged his shoulders, and El got the hint and rested her hands on his shoulders. "And we just... sway."

Mike led El in the subtle circles as they spun slowly around. Mike looked down at El intently, slightly embarrassed but his stomach full of butterflies. El was suddenly struck with the realization that Mike was taller than her. He had been taller than her since she met him, but now that she was so close to him, she realized just how significant the height difference was. It made El feel sparkly, dancing with him like this. Less sparkly than kissing him, but still sparkly enough that she never wanted to stop. If this is what happened at the Snow Ball, than she definitely wanted to go.

"So you go to a dance with someone you like? Like a friend?" El asked hesitantly. Then she remembered the first time he had told her about the dance. He had said that you don't go with a friend, or a sister. She shook her head at her own words. "No, not a friend."

Mike nodded. "You go to dances with... someone you like more than a friend." Mike swallowed and peered at El, searching her expression for a reaction.

A smile blossomed across El's face. "More than a friend." She repeated, savoring the words.

"Yeah." Mike said, shuffling his feet awkwardly.

"Can we go to the Snow Ball?" El asked.

Mike's eyebrows raised. "You... want to?"

El nodded, blush creeping up to her cheeks.

"Then yes, yeah, absolutely." Mike grinned goofily.

"Are we more than friends?" El asked Mike.

Mike cleared his throat and his eyes avoided hers until they came to rest on her lips, which was much too dangerous a sight. His mind was consumed with their kiss and Mike had to shake his head a bit to clear his thoughts away. "I-If you want to be, El."

El smiled and looked down. "I do." She mumbled.

Mike grinned goofily. "Good."

Mike's shoulders were warm beneath El's hands, and when he got nervous they shrugged up towards his ears, taking El's hands with them. Mike's hands were placed lightly on her hips, on the sliver of safe space between her pelvis and her midriff. His thumbs grazed her hipbones and it felt very ticklish.

Mike smiled at her lazily and leaned his head down to meet hers, so their foreheads touched. El's arms felt awkward bent between them, so she slid them behind Mike's neck, so her elbows were parallel with his ears. She tipped her face forward a bit, so their noses were bumped against each others awkwardly. Each breath they took they inched closer to each other, anticipation for their looming kiss was making both of them feel sparkly. Their lips brushed against each others, a whisper of a kiss rather than a real one, when the door banged open.

Mike stumbled back from Eleven, blushing furiously. Hopper stood in the doorway, his expression shocked. Mike stuttered, his cheeks resembling the color of a pomegranate, while El stood in the center of the room, not really understanding why Mike was so embarrassed and Hopper was so shocked.

Hopper sucked in a breath, trying to control himself. He stepped to the side of the doorway and pointed toward the front door. "Out." He said, his voice drawn and seething.

Mike nodded vigorously and gathered his things, before scurrying out the door. El frowned at Hopper, her eyebrows drawn together. "Why did Mike have to leave?" She asked.

Hopper was shaking a bit in shock. "You're too young to kiss!" He insisted.

El shook her head. "No." She said simply.

Hopper blanched. "Y-yes!"

El smiled. "No, we aren't."

Hopper crossed his arms and frowned like a petulant child. "Yes."

"No." El stated. "Mike and I are more than friends."

Hopper turned a peculiar shade of violet. "W-what?" He sputtered.

"Yes." El smiled. "We are going to the... Snow Ball together on friday." El tested the words on her tongue, liking the way they sounded. Sweet and hopeful.

Hopper's arms were fluttering through the air. He didn't know what to do, he didn't have anyone to consult with to figure what to do. Dealing with his sort-of daughter going on a *date* was not something he was prepared to be confronted with. He was way out of his element. "The... the *dance*?" Hopper asked.

El nodded and smiled. "Yes."

Hopper ran a hand through his hair, stumbling about disorientedly. He desperately needed a cigarette to calm his nerves. "So... what? You need a dress or something?"

El's eyebrows drew together. "Do I?"

"Uh..." Hopper searched for his pack of cigarettes before thumbing it open. He tapped one out before seeing the look and El's face and putting it back into his pocket. "I don't know, El, I'm not good at this kind of stuff... maybe you should ask Nancy or Joyce."

"Mom is coming home late tonight," El said. "Can I ask Nancy?"

"Sure-" Hopper narrowed his eyes. "As long as you promise you're going there to talk to Nancy, and not just to see Mike."

El hadn't even thought about that. "Promise." She said. She was curious about what she would have to do to go the Snow Ball with Mike, and excited about what information Nancy might divulge to her. Maybe she'd even be able to see Mike.

Maybe she'd be able to properly kiss him.

"Okay. Fine. I'll take you." Hopper sighed and grabbed his keys. "To talk to *Nancy*."

El grinned and grabbed Hopper's arm. "Thank you."

Hopper looked down at the girl and tried to contain his smile. "Yeah, yeah, kid."

Author's Note: Thanks for being so patient guys! I'll try to update soon, I promise. I love y'all! Please review/favorite/follow if you enjoyed, and see you next time!

Kisses,

Chattrre

9. Author's Note

Author's Note: Hiya Lovelies! I know you were probably expecting a chapter... don't worry, I'm not abandoning! I'm slaving away at the next chapter, I promise you it will be out soon! I just wanted to let you know that I have a Stranger Things Instagram account now, so please follow if you can! It's me and my friend, and we're super excited! If you follow and comment where you found me from, I'll follow you back! You might even see me cosplaying as Eleven! I just wanted to share this with you guys, and I hope that you'll be supportive like I know you will! I love you all, and I'll be back soon with a new chapter, I promise! The account is [strangerschnapple](#)!

Kisse,

Chattré

10. Chapter 9, Part 1

Author's Note: Hope y'all enjoy this chapter, and please review/follow/favorite if you do! XOXO and on with the story!

El and Hopper drove to the Wheeler's house an hour later because Hopper insisted on going after the boys' school day was over so he wouldn't have to be forced to consider arresting the other boys for truancy. El was fidgeting, nervous, wanting to just *be there* already. She wanted to hurry up and investigate this dance, and then be able to see Mike. Hopper tapped on the steering wheel, trying to release his excess energy as they pulled up to the Wheeler's house.

El reached to unbuckle her seatbelt, but Hopper cleared his throat. "Um, El?"

"Yes?" She asked.

"Uh... be safe." Hopper said.

El's eyebrows drew together in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"Just... uh..." Hopper searched for words to voice what he met but he came back empty-handed. "Never-nevermind. Just don't do anything you aren't comfortable with."

El, still confused, responded. "Okay..." She said. She unbuckled her seatbelt and made her way to the front door, pulling Mike's jacket tighter around herself to fend off the cold. She knocked on the front door, and she was surprised to see it was Jonathan, clothes rumpled and looking pleased, who opened the door.

At the sight of his sister, Jonathan's eyes went wide. "El?"

"Jonathan? What are you doing here?" El asked.

"Uh..." Jonathan was turning red. "I came to see Nancy."

El smiled at Jonathan. "Me too!" She stepped forward and Jonathan let her in reluctantly. She went past him and headed up the stairs,

Jonathan trailing behind her and gradually turning redder and redder. As Eleven went to open Nancy's door, Jonathan squeaked and jumped in front of it. El's eyebrows furrowed. "What... what are you doing, Jonathan?"

Jonathan swallowed, his eyes avoiding El's. Slowly red was creeping up his neck and overtook his face, he was blushing to his roots. "You should, uh... you should knock first. She may not be... all ready..."

El stepped forward a bit, and Jonathan flinched back, hitting his head on the door.

"Jonathan?" Nancy asked from inside her room. "Is that you?"

Before Jonathan could respond, Nancy opened the door and Jonathan, suddenly off-balance due to the lack of the door he was leaning on, tripped backwards into Nancy. They collided and Nancy stumbled backwards into her bed. She was wearing only a bathrobe and her hair was a disaster.

"What the-" Nancy began, only to be cut off by Jonathan, who was stringing apologies together like beads on a necklace.

"I'm sorry, I'm so, so sorry, Nancy!" Jonathan said.

"Oh, it's fine, Jonathan. I'm okay, really." Nancy said, then she caught sight of Eleven smiling in the doorway. "Hi, El!" Nancy said. "What are you doing here?" She asked.

"I wanted to ask you about the Snow Ball." said Eleven.

Jonathan looked confused. "The Snow Ball? The middle school dance? Why would you want to know about that?"

Nancy snorted. "Because my brother obviously got the guts to ask her properly, didn't he?"

Eleven blushed and nodded, looking down at her shoes. "Yes..."

"Wait, what? He did what?" Jonathan asked, flabbergasted.

Nancy raised an eyebrow at Jonathan. "You... didn't know? Jonathan,

they like each other. There is a dance on Friday. And people who like each other go on dates, like to a dance. Therefore my brother asked your sister to the dance."

Jonathan sat next to Nancy on her bed, leaning his head on her shoulder and pouting like a petulant child. "I don't like this."

Nancy leaned over and pecked Jonathan on the cheek, and he turned pink. "I think it's cute. Now, leave please."

Jonathan looked up at Nancy in confusion. "What?"

"El and I have to talk about girl things, and we can't do that with a boy here. So, shoo." Nancy explained.

"But, Nancy-" Jonathan complained.

"Don't worry, I'll make it up to you later." Nancy kissed Jonathan sweetly for a moment, and El grinned knowingly. "Go play downstairs with the rest of the boys."

Jonathan grumbled and started walked out of the room, closing the door with a soft click behind him.

Nancy patted a soft on the bed beside her. "Come here, El." Nancy smiled. El padded up to her and sat beside her, tucking her feet underneath her to sit criss-cross applesauce. "So you want to know about the dance?"

"Yes," said El. "Will you tell me?"

"Of course," Nancy smiled. "I'm your resident girl, I'm here for you to ask questions to. What do you want to know?"

"What's it... what's it like?" El asked.

"Do you want to know the whole thing? Every aspect of it? Or just the general idea?" Nancy asked.

"The whole thing." El said.

"Well, getting ready for the dance is a process. You'd want to wear a

dress, right?" Nancy asked. El nodded vigorously. "Then we'd buy you a dress, and we'd get you all nice and pretty. And Mike would wear a suit—"

"A what?" El asked.

"A suit. It's fancy clothes for a boy." Nancy explained. "Then you and Mike will go to the gym, and there will be streamers and music, and it will probably be dark with some sparkly lights. You and Mike will probably dance and have some food or something, and then you'll come back home. Dances are really fun, especially if you like the person you go with."

"Are you going to the dance?" El asked.

Nancy responded, confused. "What?"

"With Jonathan? Are you going to the Snow Ball with Jonathan?" El asked.

"Oh, no." Nancy smiled.

"Why not?" El asked. "Don't you like Jonathan?"

Nancy blushed. "Well, yes. But we can't go to a middle school dance because we're in high school."

"Oh." El said. "So, I get to wear a dress?"

"Yeah!" Nancy smiled, grateful to be off the topic of her relationship with El's brother. "We can buy you one of your own this time, not just one of my old ones."

"When?" El asked.

"Oh, well... it's Monday, and the dance is on Friday? We should go shopping on Wednesday!" Nancy said.

El clapped excitedly. Shopping was something she was very new at, but she liked her new clothes the Joyce had gotten her, and getting a pretty dress that she chose sounded wonderful to her. "Wednesday!" El confirmed.

"Yeah, Wednesday." Nancy said. "Oh, you must be so excited for your date!"

El's eyebrows drew together. "Date? What's a date?"

"Why don't you ask Mike?" Nancy giggled conspiratorially. She pulled her bathrobe tighter around her like she was cold, then attempted to smooth her hair a bit. "Do you want to go say hi to Mike and the rest of the boys?"

El nodded. "Yes."

"Why don't you go downstairs and say hi?" Nancy suggested. "If you have anymore questions, you can talk to me."

"Okay." El said. She stood up and walked to the door, but Nancy's voice made her hand still on the door handle.

"Um... El?" Nancy asked. "Could you send Jonathan up too?"

El nodded and left the room, heading downstairs with a knowing smile on her face.

Author's Note: My computer made me have to split this in two, but the second half will be coming out soon!

11. Chapter 9, Part 2

Author's Note: So sorry my computer split this chapter in two! Please review/follow/favorite if you enjoy, and see you at the end!

Jonathan trundled down the stairs, a deep frown on his face. Mike heard the noise and turned to look, hoping to see El, but when his eyes rested on Jonathan, he returned back to sorting his plans for the campaign. "What do you want, Jonathan?" He asked, disappointed.

"Your sister kicked me out of her room." Jonathan admitted.

"Why?" Noah asked.

"Because she and El are talking about *girl things*." Jonathan said, pulling up a chair to sit at the campaign table with the rest of the boys.

Mike shot up. "El's here?" He started to make his way up toward the stairs.

"There's no point in going up, they'll just kick you out." Jonathan said.

"Why?" Mike asked, brows furrowed.

"I told you, they're talking about *girl things*." Jonathan sighed dejectedly.

"Like what?" Dustin asked.

"Like the Snow Ball." Jonathan said. Will shot Mike a look. He was the only one that knew that Mike had asked El to the Snow Ball, and Mike wanted to keep it that way. He was afraid his friends would make fun of him for it. He knew the fear was irrational, all jokes would be good-natured, and he was planning on telling them, just not yet. Of course, Jonathan didn't know that.

"The Snow Ball? Why?" Lucas asked.

Jonathan looked confused. "Because Mike asked Eleven to the Snow Ball." He stated the fact plainly, as if it was obvious.

Dustin jumped up. "YOU DID WHAT?"

"AND YOU DIDN'T TELL US?" Lucas yelled.

Mike turned red and laid his head on the table in embarrassment.

"Guys, calm down." Will said.

"DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS?" Lucas asked.

"Well, yes-" Will admitted.

"AND YOU DIDN'T TELL US!" Dustin asked.

"It wasn't my secret to tell!" Will insisted. "You know he would have told you eventually!"

"EVENTUALLY?" Dustin and Lucas chorused.

"Guys, SHUT UP!" Mike jumped up, banging his hand against the table, shaking it enough that the minifigures fell over. The palms of his hands stung, so he balled them into tight fists. Everyone went silent. "I asked El to the Snow Ball, yes, but I didn't tell you for this precise reason. I didn't want you to... freak out or anything. Which you just did!"

"Yeah, we're freaking out! You asked a girl- *our friend, El-* to the dance! On a date! Mike, you're going on a date *with El!*" Dustin said.

Mike bit his lip. "Well, yes."

Dustin fixed him with a look. "Mike! How are you not freaking out about this? This is crazy!"

Mike tried to contain his grin, but it spread across his face nonetheless. "I know! And this time, she really know what it means, and she wants to go! With me! In public!"

"That, in itself, is crazy." said Lucas.

Mike smacked his arm with a laugh. "Shut up."

Jonathan fixed Mike with a mock glare. "You better treat my sister right, or Will and I will have to beat you up."

Will turned purple. "Jonathan- I-I can't beat anyone up! Especially not Mike!"

Jonathan ruffled his brother's hair fondly. "I'm joking, Will."

"O-oh." Will stuttered.

"You guys are going to the Snow Ball too, right?" Mike asked.

The boys looked at each other, then split into peals of giggles.

"Us? Go to the Snow Ball? With who?" Dustin laughed.

"Well, Will could ask Jennifer Hayes." Mike said.

Will sputtered. "N-n-n-n-no! I absolutely could not!"

"And who would we ask?" Lucas said, motioning to himself and Dustin.

Mike shrugged. "I mean, you could just go together."

Lucas and Dusting looked at each other, and then back at Mike. "EW! GROSS, NO!"

Will said, "We'll all probably just stay home and watch Stars Wars."

The other boys nodded. "But, what about me and El?" Mike asked.

"You'll go to the Snow Ball of course," Dustin said. "For some *alone time*."

"So, you and my sister are dating? Or just going on a date?" Jonathan asked, confused.

"Mike's too big of a wimp to ask El to be his girlfriend." Dustin laughed.

Mike turned red. "Am not! I don't want her to misunderstand what it means."

"Well, what if she did get it?" Will asked.

Mike bit his lip nervously. "Well, then what if she says no?"

"You'll never know if you don't ask." Lucas pointed out.

Mike heard footsteps thumping down the stairs. "Shh! Shut up, everyone, be quiet!" Mike hissed, waving his arms frantically, trying to shush his friends.

"Mike?" El came down the stairs.

"H-hi, El!" Mike stuttered, perking up at seeing her face.

"Can I talk to you?" She asked.

Mike stood up. "S-sure." He stuttered.

"Ooooo..." Lucas and Dustin teased. Mike blushed and threw them a look, then followed El up the stairs.

As soon as they got to the top, El grabbed Mike's hand and pulled him into the kitchen, turning Mike even redder. As soon as they were hidden from sight, El turned to face Mike, and Mike ran his free hand through his hair nervously. "W-what did you want to talk to me about El?"

El smiled. "The dance. Nancy told me you would wear a suit."

Mike nodded, frowning slightly. That was the one aspect of the dance he wasn't looking forward to wearing something so uncomfortable. "Yeah, I will."

"And I'll wear a dress." El said.

"Yeah." Mike imagined El in a nice dress, and his cheeks pinked. He was so lucky.

"Mike, what is a date?" El asked.

Mike balked for a moment, mentally cursed his sister, putting all these ideas into El's head and then making him explain it. "A date is like when two people who like each other go places together."

"Like friends?" El asked.

"More than friends. Sometimes they kiss." Mike said.

"Jonathan and Nancy kiss." El observed.

Mike stuck his tongue out in disgust. "Well, yeah, but that's different. They're dating."

"They're dating because they kiss," El reasoned. "So are we dating because we kiss?"

Mike flushed. "Uh... no?"

"Why?" El asked. "We kiss."

"I... guess so." Mike said.

"So why aren't we dating?" El tilted her head to the side in confusion.

"B-because I haven't asked you yet." Mike stuttered.

"Why don't you ask me now?" El asked.

Mike's eyes went wide. "Well- um... because... I'm afraid you'll say no. Or that you don't know what it means." He admitted.

El reached out and touched Mike's face, his eyes grew wide in shock, and he squeezed her hand tighter. "Mike... I'll say yes, and I know what it means. It means I get to go places with you, and hold your hand, and I can kiss you and it's okay. I want that."

"Um... okay then," Mike looked down at his toes, blushing, then sucked in a breath, summoning all his courage and asked. "Do you... do you want to go out with me, El?"

"Go out?" El asked.

"It means date." Mike explained.

Mike looked up to see El's face melt into a smile. "Yes, I want to go out with you, Mike."

"Thank god." Mike sighed. His cheek prickled where El was touching it, and hesitantly he reached around El and placed his hand on her lower back, moving her closer toward him. She giggled and shuffled forward. Mike and El leaned closer together, each breath moving them a little bit closer, until Mike lost patience and he pressed his lips against hers. He smiled against El's lips, liking the taste of her chapstick. He felt fireworks go off in his head, his heart swelling in happiness. He was dating *El*. They were going to the Snow Ball, *together*, on a *date*. He was the luckiest boy in the world.

He was really looking forward to that dance.

Author's Note: I'm so sorry this took so long to update, but I hope you liked this chapter! I will post the next chapter soon! Please review/follow/favorite if you enjoyed, and I'll see you next time lovelies!

Kisses,

Chattré

12. Chapter 10

Author's Note: You guys are the sweetest reviewers ever and you make me so happy! I hope you enjoy this chapter! Also janeelevenives83, you were right! You just called it a bit early! Please review/follow/favorite if you enjoy this chapter, and on with the story! Also, you all should follow me on Instagram and say hi! I'm strangerschnapple

Mike pulled away from El when he heard the tell-tale snicker, followed by obnoxious kissing noises. Mike immediately knew that someone had interrupted his moment with El by *spying* on them. He stomped toward the kitchen door, then threw it open with a bang. He was bright red and glaring at his friends. Dustin and Lucas stood in the doorway, Lucas mid-laugh and Dustin with his lips puckered, and Will was trying to pull them back downstairs, blushing with embarrassment.

At the sight of Mike, El standing confused behind him, Dustin let out one more sheepish kissing noise.

"You guys kissed!" Lucas said.

Mike's mouth opened, but no noise came out. El pushed until she was next to him, standing in the doorway. She took Mike's hand and Mike blushed, scratching his head awkwardly. "Yes." El stated.

Dustin's eyes went wide as he inspected Mike's face. His mouth was smeared with chapstick, obviously not his. "YOU GUYS KISSED ON THE LIPS?!" Dustin gestured wildly to Mike's mouth. Mike realized what Dustin was pointing out and quickly wiped his mouth on his sleeve. "Sh-shut up, Dustin." Mike muttered, turning redder. "It's not that crazy."

Lucas's eyes bugged out too, "NOT CRAZY? HAS THIS HAPPENED BEFORE?"

Before Mike could warn El not to respond, she nodded her head.

Will wouldn't stop gaping, Dustin was spastically chicken dancing in excitement, and Lucas had to sit on the floor and rock back and forth so he wouldn't hyperventilate. Mike rolled his eyes, ignoring the his face was heating up. "It's not that crazy to kiss your girlfriend, guys." Mike slipped out. He released El's hand, clapping his own over his mouth when he realized what he had just said.

"YOUR GIRLFRIEND?" Will yelled, shocked. "WHAT THE- WHAT THE WHAT?"

"I... um... AHHHH!" Mike screamed in frustration. "I DON'T NEED TO EXPLAIN MYSELF TO ANY OF YOU! COME ON EL!" Mike blushed a deep red and grabbed El's wrist, pulling her toward the front door. He tossed her her jacket and started to put on his. Confused, El put on the jacket.

"Where are you guys going?" Asked Dustin, his curly hair poking out from under his cap.

"ON A RIDE." Mike growled.

"We can come-" Will started.

"ALONE." Mike insisted. He grabbed a pair of keys and shoved them in his pocket, then threaded his fingers through El's, ignoring his friends wolf-whistles (**Author's Note: Wolfhard Whistles ;)**). El looked frantically back and forth, everything was happening too fast for her to process.

"Mike?" She asked, voice shaky and unsure. He didn't answer, only took her outside with and slammed the door behind them, then unlatched his bike. El was starting to get scared. "M-Mike?" She asked, on the verge of tears. "What's going on?"

Mike stilled, hearing the shaking in El's voice. He sighed, angry at himself for frightening El. "It's nothing, El, really. I just need to blow off some steam. You... you don't have to come with me if you feel uncomfortable." He said.

El shook her head. "No, I want to come with you."

Mike's face was overcome with a grin. "Good." He leaned over and

pecked El on the cheek quickly. He swung his leg over his bike, then patted behind him so El would know to sit. She did, and put her feet on the spokes of his wheels, gripping Mike's jacket tightly. She tucked her chin into the juncture of Mike's neck, and Mike could feel her warm breath against his jaw. He liked it more than he would have liked to admit.

He took off, hoping that his friends wouldn't follow them. He wanted some alone time with El, and he would wait to talk to them about him and El dating. He still had yet to come to terms with the *immense awesomeness of it*. He biked fast and hard toward the forest, intent on taking El to a place he had been meaning to show her for a long time.

El could see a particularly large bump in the road coming up, so she slipped her arms around Mike's waist and held on tightly. At the sudden increase of contact, Mike squeaked and his foot slid off of the pedal. He tipped over, bringing the bike and El with him. Just before they were going to hit the ground, Mike screaming bloody murder, they stopped in mid air. Mike, still screaming, held onto the handles of his bike so hard his knuckles turned white as the bike righted itself. As soon as they were back on solid ground, Mike gasped out a awestruck, "Wow." He turned to look at El. "You're amazing, you know that?"

El blushed and smiled, wiping her bloody nose on her sleeve. "No..."

"El, you are so amazing, it's crazy." Mike insisted. "I'm so lucky."

El smiled. "Where are we going, Mike?" She asked.

Mike turned and started to bike again, not failing to notice that El's arms were locked tight around him even though the road wasn't bumpy anymore. "I wanna show you this place I found." He said. "In the woods. I was exploring when... when I thought you were gone, and I found this place, and it made me think of you. But after you came back, I never got to show you."

"Mike?" El whispered. "I'm sorry, about everything."

"You're back now, that's all that matters, El." Mike said. "I used to go there whenever I missed you." He admitted.

"I'm sorry." El apologized again, starting to cry. Mike stopped the bike, coasting to the side of the road. El let go of him and rubbed her eyes, smearing her tears across her face.

"El... please, please stop crying." Mike took El's wrists into his hands gently, pulling her hands away from her face so he could see her eyes. "All this... it wasn't- isn't your fault, okay?"

El sniffled. "Promise?"

Mike smiled. "I promise." He looked around, threading his fingers through hers hesitantly. "We're here."

He stepped off his bike, El following him, and he pushed the bike into the forest with one hand, still holding El's hand with the other. The noise of leaves crunching rung in Mike's ears, he remembered stumbling upon this strip of trees one night when he had been frantically looking for El. He had jumped off of his bike and, tears blurring his vision, ran blindly into the woods. He had found a small clearing not ten yards from the road, but so well hidden that no one knew about it. At the time, the grass was greener. Now, since it was winter, the grass was gone, leaving the ground frosty and hard, except for the Christmas roses that sprung up in bunches around the grove. Mike looked up at the clouded sky, taking in the grays and light blues.

"Pretty." El whispered, her eyes sweeping over the secluded little clearing.

Mike squeezed her hand. "I know, right?" He said. "Here." He reached down and picked a rose for her, then tucked it behind her ear. El let go of Mike's hand and stepped back from him a bit, then spun in a circle. "How do I look?" She asked.

"Pretty." Mike smiled. "Really pretty."

El giggled. "I like it here." She laid down, then patted the spot of ground beside her. "Come." She said.

Mike set down his bike and walked over to her, then laid down beside her, tucking an arm under his neck so he could still look at

her. He watched, fascinated, as El pointed out all the things that caught her attention. She was so amazing, full of wonder at everything and everyone. It took a while for her to come to this point, especially because of the fact of her upbringing, but he was so proud of her for turning her lack of knowledge of the world and general horror of her early life into wonder and curiosity.

More than anything, he wanted to tell her he loved her right now. He knew he did love her. It wasn't a question, he wasn't falling in love with her, he already had. That first week with her, that was falling in love. This, this was relishing in it. She was all he ever wanted, the most important thing in his little world. But the beautiful thing about love is that it has so many flavors. He loved his family (most of the time), his friends (when they weren't being douchebags), and his life, and also he loved El. He loved El in a way that he wanted to protect, keep sacred, at least for a little while. He wouldn't tell her yet, he wanted to have his own secret for a time. But when he told her, it would make it all the more worthwhile.

El noticed Mike's staring and turned to look at him. "What are you thinking about, Mike?"

"You." He smiled. "I'd like to kiss you again, El, if that's alright."

El blushed and nodded, so Mike leaned forward and pressed his lips against hers. The wonderful thing about kissing El was that it never got less shocking, less exciting. He could still feel the same fizz of wonder and hope in the center of his chest he felt the first time. He placed his hand under her chin so he could move closer to her and he deepened the kiss, just a bit. He wanted to reassure himself that this wasn't just a dream. El responded in turn, experimentally weaving her fingers in his dark hair.

Mike pulled back and smiled at El dreamily, feeling the christmas roses tickling the back of his neck, and the cold hard ground against his side. "I'm excited for the Snow Ball on Friday." Mike said.

"Me too," El sighed. "I like it here, and I like you. I like being with you, and I like kissing you, and I like being your girlfriend." El said, instinctively touching the flower Mike had given her.

"Good." Mike grinned, then hopped to his feet. El tilted her head up, watching him in confusion as he jumped up and down. He cupped his hands around his mouth, screaming, "YOU HEAR THAT, WORLD? EL LIKES ME! SHE LIKES ME, AND SHE LIKES KISSING ME, AND SHE LIKES DATING ME, SO YOU CAN GO SUCK IT!"

He turned to look at El, who was laughing. "I can't help it," He shrugged. "You make me feel too much, I need to get it out somehow."

"I have an idea." El said, still blunt as ever. "Come kiss me again."

Mike blushed and grinned goofily. "O-okay."

So he did.

Author's Note: This is so much fun to write you guys, you have no idea! I hope you enjoyed this chapter and if you did, please let me know by reviewing, following, and favoriting! I'll see you next time and I love you!

Kisses,

Chattrre

13. Chapter 11

Author's Note: This is on Wattpad now too! My user's hocuspocuspjo if you want to check it out! Also, on my instagram (strangerschnapple) Finn liked three photos and commented once, Caleb liked and commented, and Jordan (new character) responded to my DM and liked and commented! WHAT IS HAPPENING!

After Mike biked El back to his house, she was confiscated by an angrily sputtering Jonathan who was rambling about El "disappearing" and going off with Mike to "god knows where" doing "god knows what". Nancy tried to calm him down, tugging on his sleeve and trying to distract him with kisses on the cheek, but he was so worked up about it that he took El and Will and drove them home without so much as a goodbye. Mike was left alone trying to fend off Lucas and Dustin's many questions on his and El's romantic life, but finally he expelled them from his house, leaving himself alone in his giddy splendor.

He slept in El's fort that night, and he felt content.

Mike woke up that morning smelling like El, that particular brew of cinnamon and warm eggos. He glanced down at his watch, realized what time it was, and hurriedly dressed. He stuffed an Eggo in his pocket for his breakfast, and then biked to school, shoveling down the Eggo even though his mother had told him it was dangerous to bike and eat. He arrived to school a little on the early side, and was hooking up his bike when he heard a familiar voice. "Hey, Frogface!"

Mike turned to see Troy, sporting dark bruises on his chin and cheek. Then Mike remembered *he* was the one to turn Troy black and blue. He felt proud, but also scared. Troy was going to have to get Mike back for that, his delicate ego had been bruised and someone needed to pay.

"You going to the Snow Ball on Friday?" Troy asked.

"Yes..." Mike answered cautiously.

"Are you taking that little fairy's sister?" Troy laughed harshly. "Did you get him to ask her for you, since you're a little pussy?"

Mike cringed. He hated Troy, and he especially hated when Troy talked rudely about Will and El. "Go to hell, Troy. I asked her myself."

"Did you?" Troy said. "And how the hell did you get her to say yes?"

Mike slammed his bike, making a sharp, angry noise. "Because she's my girlfriend, dumbass. Can I go now?"

Troy and James had been laughing mocking, but at the word *girlfriend*, they quieted. "Your girlfriend?"

"Yeah." Mike said. He moved to go past them, but Troy blocked his path.

"Prove it." He said.

"Prove what?" Mike asked.

"Prove that she's your girlfriend." Troy said.

Mike made a face. "How am I supposed to do that?"

"At the Snow Ball," Troy said. "Have her kiss you. In front of us. And you can't say a word to her to make her, she has to do it herself."

"And if she doesn't?" Mike asked.

"Then I'll kiss her, and then she'll be my girlfriend." Troy grinned, obviously assuming that would be the outcome. "And then we'll know that she picked me, and that you're just a stupid Frogface."

"No!" Mike said. "There's no way I'd do that to El, especially without her permission."

"Fine." Troy snickered. "Pussy."

Mike huffed. "Just shut up, Troy." (**Lord in heaven if this was set in modern times I'd want Mike to say, "You're so extra, Troy."**)

"If you do it, I'll never talk to any of you again." Troy said.

Mike stopped. "What?"

"I'll ignore you completely. No calling you out as faggots, nothin'." Troy said. "And if I do, you can sick that creepy girl who broke my arm on us. You know, the one from around when the faggot disappeared."

Despite the fact Mike despised what Troy called his friends, he couldn't help but smile a little bit at the fact that Troy didn't realize that Mike's girlfriend, the same one who Troy thought would be his girlfriend soon enough, was the same girl he was scared of.

"Deal." Mike said, sticking out his hand for Troy to shake on it. If getting El to kiss him was going to pardon him and his friends from ridicule, then he was all for it. Plus, would it be so terrible for his girlfriend to kiss him? It wasn't like El would suddenly be inexplicably disgusted by Mike or anything.

"Great," Troy smirked, shaking Mike's hand. "Can't wait." He then wiped the hand Mike had touched onto James's jacket, James's face contorting in disgust.

Mike was certain he would win.

Of course, nothing was ever that simple.

As soon as El woke up, she leaned over about put on the wristwatch Mike had given her the first week he had known her, when she had to meet them at 3:15. Right now though, it was 9:24, so school had already started for the middle school, and she couldn't try to talk with Mike through his supermom until at least lunch, when he might be using the Heathkit Hamshack.

Hopper would be coming over to teach her math in an hour, so El decided to make herself an Eggo and study the D&D manuel Will had left for her. She swore that soon she would be able to participate in the game that Mike was so obsessed with.

The Eggo box was cold when she removed it from the freezer, and she pulled two frozen waffles from the half-empty box. She stuck

them into the toaster slots and started to toast them. She didn't know what to do while she waited for them to toast, so she counted to herself.

When the Eggos were down they popped up with a chirpy dinging noise. She burned her fingers a bit while taking out her Eggos, she really had to remember to let the Eggos cool a bit before getting them out of the toaster. She put her Eggos, onto a gray porcelain plate and set them on the dining room table, then thunked the heavy D&D book in front of her. She tried to read it, but the words were too weird, long, and confusing, so she just looked at the pictures. It was easier when Will read to her, he helped her understand. Maybe not as well as Mike would have, but she wanted to surprise him with her new ability to play with him.

She decided that the elves were pretty, and she found one that looked like Mike and stared at it longingly for a good five minutes. She wished Mike was here, so she could kiss him again like last night. She took a bite of Eggo and then stood up, looking around for a writing utensil. Under a sheaf of now unnecessary Missing posters (both for her and for Will), she found the green crayon she had used for Math the other day. She sat back down and shakily wrote in the D&D book, next to the the elf-Mike:

Mike + El = 3 (Pretend that's a heart, damn fanfiction won't let me insert special characters!)

She smiled and closed the book, then finished off her Eggos. She was happy.

So of course, something must go wrong.

Author's Note: I'm the worst. Sorry for not updating sooner and for such a short (and filler) chapter! It was necessary, and I promise you there will be more soon! But thank you for all the support and please follow/favorite/review if you enjoyed!

Kisses,

Chattré

14. Chapter 12

Author's Note: Hiya lovelies! Thank you for the sweet words, I really appreciate it! I hope you enjoy this chapter, and please review/favorite/follow if you do! I split this chapter in two because y'all were getting antsy, but the second part should be up soon!

El liked math with Hopper, but she liked talking to Mike more. Throughout her working on subtraction with her green crayon, she kept Will's supercom right next to her, ready to spring to action if Mike happened to call. And when he did, his crackling "El?" coming in at about five minutes to 12:00, El shot an excited grin at Hopper.

Hopper waved a hand dismissively, smiling slightly. "Go on, kid. Math can wait."

"Thank you, Hopper!" El grabbed the supercom and ran to her room. "Mike?"

"Hey, El!" Mike chirped. His voice was a bit garbled, but El used her powers to sharpen the connection. "What's up?"

"I've been doing math," El said. "I can't find a pencil or a pen, so I have to use a crayon."

Mike laughed at that, and El's chest warmed at the sound. She liked making him laugh.

"That's really funny." Mike said. El could hear his smile over the line. "You should come over after school and I'll give you some pens and pencils. And we can watch a movie!"

"Okay." El smiled. "Can we have Eggos?"

Mike laughed and it was a rich sound. "Sure. You know, maybe you could come over to school right when school ends and you could bike home with me and the guys! Hopper could bring you. We could show you the school."

El clapped excitedly. "Yes! I would like that." El hadn't been to the school since the last Demogorgon attack, but she decided she would put aside those memories so she could see where Mike spent most of his time.

"Great! I'm glad. There's something I really want to talk to you about." He said.

El blushed a bit, wondering what Mike might want to talk to her about.

Mike knew, of course. He wanted to see El and show her his school, take her to meet Mr. Clarke. But he was also considering telling her about the deal he made with Troy. He knew he wasn't supposed to, but he felt guilty as hell for signing her up for something she might not be comfortable with.

He heard El's voice, a mix of hope and happiness singing in it. "Okay, Mike."

"Great-" Mike turned as he heard the door open, and Lucas poked his head through the door.

"Mike!" Lucas hissed. "We have to go to History!"

Mike waved his hand dismissively. "In a minute."

Lucas frowned deeply and started counting out loud. "One, two, three, four..." Lucas tapped his foot impatiently, then tapped his wrist, miming a watch. "Five, six, seven, eight... any day now, Mike... nine, ten..."

"Fine!" Mike yelled. "Jesus!" Mike groaned, missing he could spend more time talking to El. "I have to go, El. I'll see you soon, okay?"

"Okay, Mike. Bye!" El said.

"Bye, El," Mike replied. "See you soon." He shut down the Heathkit Hamshack and turned to Lucas.

"Mike!" Lucas hissed. "We. Have. To. Go. Right. Now."

"Okay, okay!" Mike grabbed his bag and Mike and Lucas started running toward the history classroom as fast as they could.

Meanwhile El turned off Will's supercom and hummed to herself, skipping out to Hopper who was enjoying a smoke in the living room.

As soon as he saw El he put it out, his eyebrows raising, a silent question.

"Hoppy, could you take me to the school when the school day ends? Mike wants to show me his classes!" El asked.

Hopper's eyebrows drew together in confusion, "Hoppy? Who the hell is *Hoppy*?"

El pursed her lips. "You." She stated matter-of-factly. She didn't want to have to say any extra syllables, so Hoppy it was.

"Well- but- *Hoppy*?" Hopper asked.

"Yes."

"O-okay." Hopper frowned. He couldn't say no to El, but *Hoppy*? Really? Of all of the nicknames she could have given him, it had to be Hoppy.

"Will you take me to the school?" El asked.

Hopper grimaced a little bit, he was still a little salty about seeing Mike and El about to kiss. "Fine."

"Yay!" El clapped her hands and jumped up in excitement. "I'm going to bike over to Mike's after!"

"Jonathan can take you and Will home after, he's going to be at the Wheeler's anyway, he has to study for a test with Nancy." Hopper said.

El giggled when she heard Hopper talk about Jonathan and Nancy.

"What?" Hopper asked.

"I saw Jonathan and Nancy kiss!" She whispered conspiratorially.

Hopper balked. "What?"

El nodded and folded her arms. "They're dating."

"Does Joyce know?" Hopper asked.

El shrugged. "I don't know. They have sleepovers too. Nancy and Jonathan. But they stay in Nancy's room." She nodded. "Mike knocked once to try to get some tape, but Nancy said he couldn't come in because they were studying."

Hopper turned red, fully aware that Nancy and Jonathan probably weren't just studying. "Yeah, okay, let's talk about something else. Like... like... like the dance! The dance! How's the dance?"

"Good... Nancy is taking me to buy a dress on Wednesday!" El smiled.

"Do you need money for that?" Hopper asked.

El tilted her head to the side, a birdlike show of confusion. "Mo-ney?"

"To pay for it?" Hopper tried to explain. El's eyes were still clouded with confusion. Hopper couldn't seem to find the right words, so he dismissed the thought with a wave of his hand. "Just, here." Hopper pulled out his wallet and handed El a few of the green bills. "Put it in your pocket, and then give it to Mike to give to Nancy when I take you to the school, okay?"

El nodded and stuffed the folded cash into her pocket.

"So, you'll take me to the school?" El asked.

"Yeah, sure, kid. Now come here and do some math." Hopper's smile creped up his features.

El skipped over and sat next to Hopper, picking up her green crayon. "Thanks, Hoppy."

Hopper hesitated a little at the name El had called him, but he grinned and answered. "Of course, kid."

**Author's Note: Second part should hopefully be done soon!
Expect the money and Troy coming into play... DUN DUN DUN**

**Please favorite/follow/review if you enjoyed, and I'll talk to you
soon!**

15. Chapter 13

Author's Note: You're making my little heart sing with all your sweet reviews! A lot of you though that the money would end up in Troy's hands via the good 'ol "GIMME YOUR MONEY" cliche... you're wrong. Heheehe tell me if you're surprised and I'm sorry in advance! Please review/favorite/follow if you enjoyed!

Hopper dropped El off just as school was being let out, so students were pouring out of the school. El was a little scared by the sheer amount of unfamiliar faces, her hands shook a little bit when she opened Hopper's passenger door and stepped out into the crowd. The rushing of people kicked up to wind so she had to hold her skirt down with her hands, waddling uncomfortably and searching for Mike. A couple of minutes later the grounds were barren, children piled into cars or on bikes zipping away from the school. El frowned, she still had not spotted Mike, so she decided to venture into the school.

It took El a couple of minutes to figure out that the door was a pull door, not a push door, but eventually she made it inside the barren halls of the middle school. It was a little disconcerting to see the building so empty, but it was helpful for El because she could hear the remaining people in the school. To her right she heard boisterous laughter coming closer, and to the left she heard a locker rattling. After considering for a moment, she decided to head left. Whoever was coming towards her from the right would catch up to her eventually.

She walked towards the noise of the locker, liking the way her heels clicked against the concrete floors. She rounded the corner, and there was Mike, digging about in his locker and sniffling a little.

"Mike?" El asked.

Mike turned to her, eyes wide and scared, tears bubbling up. "Oh!" He sniffed. He wiped at his eyes with his sleeves, tears soaking into the fabric of his shirt. "I'm so sorry- I totally forgot that you were coming!" Mike's voice is measured and soft, trying to contain his

emotions.

"Are you okay?" El asked. She reached forward to touch Mike's shoulder. He winced at the contact but didn't move away.

"I'm fine, El." Mike's hand gripped into tight fists.

"Friends don't lie." El said.

Mike stepped back a little, forcing El's hand to drop at her side. "I said, *I'm fine.*"

El tried not to feel hurt, but obviously something was wrong and Mike wasn't telling her.

The other people in the building, the boisterous laughter, they were getting closer, and for some reason it made El feel anxious.

Mike shifted, looking uncomfortable, so El tried to change the subject away from whatever Mike was hiding from her. She remembered the dress money, the money she was supposed to give to Mike to give to Nancy. She reached into her pocket and pulled out the wad of bills, then pressed it into Mike's palm. "For Nancy."

Mike's eyes widened as he inspected the cash. "El, this... this is a lot of money!" He turned red and pushed it back towards El. "I can't- I can't take that! What if I lost it? You keep it, give to Nancy yourself!"

"No!" El put her hands up, making it clear she would not be taking it. "Hopper told me to give it to you to give to Nancy, so that's what I'm doing!"

"But- El- I can't-" Mike stuttered, waving the money around.

The boisterous laughter had arrived in the form of two boys that El recognized. Mouth breathers, bad people. El didn't want them here.

"Well, this is interesting." Came a voice. Mike froze up, flushing angry, embarrassed red.

El turned to see Troy and his trusty henchman James, smirking down at her and Mike.

"Frogface! You brought your little girlfriend!" Troy grinned. "I didn't think I was gonna see you until Friday!" He leaned forward and tugged on a lock of El's hair, then twirled it around his finger. El frowned and pulled back, the lock of hair falling back into place.

Troy surveyed the scene and raised an eyebrow, focusing on Mike trying to force the money into El's hands. "What's Frogface tryin' pay you for?" Troy asked, smirking. "See, I told you he was paying her to date him!" He laughed and nudged James.

Mike crumbled the money and shoved it into his pocket. "No, I am *not* paying her to date me."

Troy leaned forward and plucked the money from Mike's pocket. "Jesus, you're expensive as hell." Troy raised an eyebrow cockily, counting the bills, an appreciative and suggestive eye trained on El. "I wonder how much you've done for him..." Troy's voice trailed off suggestively.

El's eyebrows furrowed with confusion, and Mike turned the color of a tomato with embarrassment and anger.

"What do you mean?" El asked.

" *"What do you mean?"* " James mocked.

Troy hit James across the arm with a swift thwack. "Shut up, you idiot." Troy cleared his throat. "Frogface here," He began to explain. "Is paying *you* to date him. To kiss him, hold his hand, go on little gay picnics and shit like that. Considering how much this is, probably more."

El still was confused. "Pay-ing?" She asked.

"Do you seriously not know what paying is?" Troy laughed cruelly at El's obliviousness. "She may be hot, but she's dumb as a bag of rocks." He said to James.

"Shut up!" Mike growled. "Don't talk about her like that, you don't even know her!"

Troy smirked. "Oh, but I'd like to."

"What... what is going on?" El asked. She was started to feel overwhelmed, her face was flushing and her palms were itchy with discomfort.

"Do you seriously not get it? Jesus christ. He's *using you*." Troy said.

Using you. That El understood. Papa had used her, used her to do bad things. Was Mike using her? Really? But she had trusted him! How could he do something like that? *Pay-ing* her? Whatever that meant, Troy seemed to think it was bad. Was Mike making her do something bad? But they liked each other, they liked each other more than friends! Was he lying about that to take advantage of her? *Friends don't lie.* El reminded herself. But what if they weren't actually friends? Would that warrant Mike's *pay-ing* her?

El felt tears prick in her eyes. "I'm going to go, Mike. I will get pens from Will, and someone else can show me around school." She felt horrible, like someone had reached into her chest and crumbled her heart like a tin can.

"El- wait! El, no!" Mike shouted as El turned on her heel and sprinted off, away. He felt so helpless as he stood there, watching her disappear.

Troy grinned maliciously at Mike and leaned in a little bit to whisper in his ear, "Deal's still on, Wheeler. Good luck."

Author's Note: I know this is short, but I have a bunch of tests right now and I just wanted to post something! Next week I will hopefully be posting a lot because I have the week off of school. I love you guys so much, thank you! Tell me what you think about what Mike might do next, and why he was sad at the beginning! I like to hear your ideas!

Kisses,

Chattrre

16. Chapter 14

**Author's Note: NEWWW CHAPTER WOOOOO THANKS BABES PLS
KEEP UP THE FAVORITES AND FOLLOWS AND COMMENTS YALL
MAKE ME A HAPPY PIGLET SORRY FOR THE LATE UPDATE I'M
ON VACAY AND SICK WITH LIKE THE PLAGUE OR SOMETHING
IDK BUT I HOPE YOU ENJOY THIS CHAPTER**

Troy and James left soon after Troy's threat, leaving Mike alone. He felt hollow, like someone had scooped out his heart. **(I is sorry bb, but character development and plot called for fucking over your emotions. Forgive me 3 3 3)**

He had royally fucked up everything.

He sunk down to the ground, collapsing in on himself, letting the tears stream down his face, not caring one way or another about the fact that he was in the middle of the hall.

How could everything go to shit so easily?

It all started when Mike had made the mistake of telling Will about the deal with Troy.

Mike knew that the deal was stupid, and he shouldn't have agreed to that without El's consent, but he honestly didn't think it was a huge deal until he told Will.

"Wait, what?" Will steamed. "You are joking, right?"

"No," Mike said. "But it's really not a big deal, Will. She just has to kiss me in front of Troy. It's not like I signed her up to striptease or something."

"Mike! You can't do that!" Will said, turning red in anger.

Mike's brow furrowed. "I mean, I know it's not cool that I signed her up for it without asking her, but it's not like it's anything crazy. We've kissed before already. It's not a big deal, Will."

"Not a big deal! Mike, are you crazy? You're talking about El like she's a fucking object or something! And she might kiss you Mike, but has she once done it in front of other people?"

Mike thought for a moment then sheepishly answered, "No."

"Exactly! Not even in front of me and Dustin and Lucas, and we're her best friends! So how do you think she'll feel when you ask her to kiss you in front of these people who she hates, who nearly killed you? Nevermind, I doubt you even stopped for a moment to think that, 'Hey, maybe El has feelings too! Maybe I should ask her opinion before making her do something she's uncomfortable with?'"

"Will, that's really unfair." Mike frowned. He seriously hadn't considered all of this, and he hated being confronted with it.

"No, Mike, what's unfair is that you persist in pretending that El is just, I don't even know, like a robot or something? She isn't here to fawn over you Mike, she has feelings, a personality, she isn't here just to say 'I love you'!"

"She hasn't." Mike interjected.

"Hasn't what?" Will asked, exasperated.

"Hasn't said I love you. She hasn't." Mike said.

Will rolled his eyes. "Whatever, Mike. Honestly, I'm just telling you, as both of your friends, that you need to at least start considering that El has some emotional depth, okay?"

Mike had never seen Will so worked up over anything- he had even cussed, he never did that- that's when Mike realized just the extent of how much he had fucked up.

"Um... I don't- What... What should I do, Will? How... how do I fix all of... this?" Mike asked. He was angry at himself, at Troy, but mostly he was just exhausted.

Will just looked at him, exasperated. "Jesus, I don't know, Mike. Tell Troy the deal's off. Come clean to El. Just do *something*." Will threw up his hands. "I don't even- next time you need life or love or

whatever advice, ask like, Dustin or Lucas please; it's just I- I-"

Mike frowned. "I can't go to Dustin or Lucas, they get all weird when I talk to them about... liking people or whatever. You're better about that, the whole 'liking people' thing."

Will turned red and huffed angrily. "Well, yeah. That's because... because I like- I... nevermind." Mike could see tears pricking in his friend's eyes and he put a hand on Will's shoulder, trying to be comforting, no matter how confused he was.

"You like?" Mike prompted.

"I- I have to go." Will pushed the strap of his bag up and turned on his heel, practically sprinting away from Mike to the pick-up line. Mike stared disorientedly in the middle of the hallway for a moment before shrugging off Will's weird behavior. Hopefully Will would come to him if he wanted to talk about whatever was bothering him so much. Mike walked to his locker and opened it with slightly shaky hands, still feeling confused and foggy with Will's behavior.

Suddenly, his locker banged shut and Lucas and Dustin stood there, grinning widely.

"Hey!" Dustin chirped. "How's El? Got any news for us?" He waggled his eyebrows suggestively.

"Have you set a date for the wedding yet?" Lucas asked.

"Oh, ha ha." Mike responded sarcastically. "Hey, do you guys know what's up with Will?"

Lucas's eyebrows furrowed. "What do you mean?"

"I was talking to him... well, about this stupid thing I did-" Mike started.

"Skip the stupid thing, we already know." said Dustin.

"What?" asked Mike.

"The whole deal with Troy? He's been talking about how he's gonna

steal your girlfriend at the Snow Ball. He's not exactly being subtle about it." Lucas explained.

"Um... and?" Mike asked.

"And what?" asked Dustin.

"Aren't you going to berate me about how stupid I am, and how I should have never done that, etc?" Mike said.

"It was stupid, and you should have never done that." Lucas deadpanned. "What's this about Will?"

"Well, I was talking to him about El, right?" Mike started, but then stopped when he noticed his friends exchanging a worried glance. "Did I... miss something?"

"No, no, no, no. Don't worry about it. Continue." His friends rushed over each other's words suspiciously, but Mike decided to pay it no heed for now.

"Then we were talking about us kissing-" Mike said.

"Wait, you and Will?" Dustin asked, eyes bugging out.

Mike made a face. "What? No. Me and El, obviously." He chose to ignore the matching frowns on his friend's faces and continued. "And then he told me to stop coming to him for love advice, and then he said he liked... something. But then he ran off without telling me what he liked."

Dustin and Lucas were silent for a moment before Lucas shouted. "Mike, are you stupid?"

Mike took a step back and folded his arms across his chest defensively. "Hey!"

Dustin rested a hand on Lucas's arm, trying to calm him down, and then fixed Mike with a hard look. "Come on, Mike. Think about it, okay?"

"Think about what?" Mike asked.

"Why Will would react like that." Lucas huffed, and Dustin tugged on his shirtsleeve warningly.

"Hey, watch it, Lucas." He said. "It's not your place."

"His place to what?" Mike asked.

"His place to tell you." Dustin said. "We're gonna... we're gonna go, Mike. Just, think about it, okay? You'll figure it out."

Mike shook his head, trying to clear his thoughts. "Wait, what? Where- where are you going?"

"Home." Lucas was still too angry to speak anything longer than a syllable, so his pointed at Mike's chest and commanded, "Think." Then they were off, leaving Mike feeling hurt and completely flabbergasted.

The hallways of the school were quickly emptying of students, and Mike realized that El would be arriving any second, but he couldn't bring himself to go out and try to find her. He knew that it was unfair of him to leave her out, but he could feel the frustrated sobs building in the back of his throat. He shoved his head in his locker to hide the hot tears slipping out of the corners of his eyes.

He hated crying.

Then the fiasco with Troy and El happened. That was disasterous. After El ran away, and Troy confirmed that, yes, the terrible deal that had ruined all his friendship was still on, Mike had no idea what to do. He needed advice desperately, but every single one of his friends now either hated him or was mad at him. He had no clue who to go to. He could, potentially, go to his mom but... that would never happen. So, he decided to go to the next best person, the most trustworthy person in his family who could probably give good advice.

Nancy.

He biked home, feeling his tears sting against the wind, but he didn't

bother to wipe them, knowing that they would be quickly replaced by new ones. He threw his bike down in his back lawn, then went in through the back door, careful to be quiet as he climbed the stairs to Nancy's room. He didn't know if his parents were home, but he didn't want to take any chances.

When he arrived at Nancy's door he debated knocking but then decided to just walk in. If he knocked, she might just dismiss him, and he needed her to help him, or at least to comfort him.

He pushed open the door to the horrific sight of Jonathan and Nancy making out on Nancy's bed. Jonathan had a hand teasing the edge of Nancy's shirt hesitantly, and Nancy had her hands tangled in Jonathan's hair, pulling his lips even closer to hers.

Mike's eyes bugged out and he let a scream.

Immediately Jonathan and Nancy jumped apart. Jonathan was turning red in embarrassment, whereas Nancy just looked pissed off. "What is it, Mike?" She cut herself off when she saw Mike was crying. "Are you... are you okay, Mike?"

Mike could feel the tears building up and he started to sob. He shook his head and through his tears managed a weak, "No."

Nancy hesitantly stood and pulled Mike into a hug, looking concerned. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Mike sniffled and didn't answer.

"Mike?" Nancy prompted, looking at Jonathan with concerned eyes. "Do you want to tell us what's wrong?"

Mike pulled back from the hug and wiped frantically at his eyes. "Okay."

I love you guys so much, thank you for being patient and I'll see you next time! Please comment/follow/favorite if you enjoyed!

17. Chapter 15 Part 1

Author's Note: New chapter y'all get HYPED. Sorry it took so long, midterms happened. And then I died. Slowly. But I have been resurrected, so enjoy. Also, don't kill me. I wanted closure, I wanted a backstory. I wanted a damn motive. So, tell me what you think.

(And follow me on Insta: strangerschnapple)

ALSO IMPORTANT IMPORTANT IMPORTANT NOTE: It HAS been confirmed that Steve and Troy are brothers. So, I am not being crazy. It is real, and I couldn't resist including it.

El got lost on her way home.

After the run-in with Mike and Troy, El ran as far and as fast away as she could, tears stinging in her eyes. When she could finally stopped crying, she didn't recognize where she was. She was standing by a row of houses, all cookie-cutter little things. All the same. It was so disconcerting that El almost started crying again, but she kept herself in check, breathing deeply and trying to calm her heartbeat.

Breath in, hold for four second, breath out.

Will had told her that if she ever got lost, the first thing she needed to do was not panic.

She didn't feel like she was panicking. Her chest felt a fluttery, but she thought that was more from Mike and Troy than from being lost.

The second thing Will had told her to do was look for landmarks she recognized.

There was nothing that she recognized. All the houses looked the same, and all the the street names were too vanilla to be worth remembering: Elm and Maple. She was on the corner of Elm and Maple. She didn't know where the corner of Elm and Maple was in relation to a way home, but at least she knew her current location.

The third thing Will told her to do was not be afraid to ask for help.

El looked around, but she couldn't see anyone on the streets. So, she decided to knock on a the front door of someone's house and see if she could get sleep that way.

She considered all of the houses for a moment. They all looked so alike that El couldn't really see if any of the houses looked nicer than the others, but after looking around for a moment longer, she realized that one of the houses had a small-ish bike hastily laid on the lawn. The bike was clearly a child's bike. The house was a little larger than the rest of the houses on the street, a little grander with big French doors on the front, the kind you can open in one fell swoop.

El considered for a moment before deciding she would go to that house to ask for directions. If they had a kid, they might sympathize and be kinder to her. She swallowed and took a deep breath, then walked as confidently and assuredly as she could to the front door.

She knocked once, then waited a moment. When no one came, she knocked one more time. Still, no one came. She looked around a bit, then saw a button near off to the left of the door. She pressed it curiously and heard the faint doorbell noise coming from the inside of the house.

"YEAH, YEAH. I'M COMING." A male's voice called. After a few more seconds of thumping coming from the inside of the house, presumably someone coming down the stairs, the doors were thrown open and a boy of high school age stood in front of El. His brown hair was ruffled in a boyish way, and his clothes were clearly nice and expensive, but they were grubby and he had the dark circles of the sleep deprived. His eyes were a lovely brown color, but they were tinted red from either crying or alcohol, probably both. He was attractive, that much was obvious, but he didn't seem to be in good shape. Mentally at least. He was fit. Physically.

El was rambling in her mind at the confusion of seeing a high school boy instead of a child. This boy had clearly not ridden the bike she had seen.

"Hullo." The boy drawled.

El cleared her throat and tried to plaster on a convincing smile. "Uh... hi."

"I'm Steve. You here to see my brother?" Steve asked. He didn't wait for El to answer. "I'll go get him."

He turned around swiftly, strutting away to find his brother, still commanding attention even in his slightly intoxicated state. He left El to awkwardly stand on the doorstep, waiting for Steve's brother (whoever that might be). She bit her lip, shifting her weight from foot to foot awkwardly. She wasn't sure who she was waiting for, or what was going on, but tears kept pricking in her eyes whenever she accidentally thought about Mike.

"TROY!" She heard Steve call. "SOMEONE'S HERE TO SEE YOU!"

El froze at the name. *Troy*? It couldn't be the same one.

"COMING!" Called a distinctly younger male voice.

El was shock still, holding her breath, as she waited for the speaker to show themselves. In her heart of hearts she prayed that it wasn't the person she thought it would be.

But luck was not on her side today, and the person who rounded the corner was the only Troy El knew, the one who tormented her friends, the one who told her Mike was using her.

In her head, El repeated every bad word she had heard Jonathan say when he stubbed his toe like a mantra.

Troy looked just as surprised to see her as she was to see him. "Why, hello."

At the Wheeler's house, Nancy had Mike sit on the edge of her bed, rubbing soothing circles on his back. "What's wrong, Mike?"

Mike sniffed, tears pooling in his eyes. "Everything."

Nancy frowned. "You're going to have to be more specific."

"Will is mad at me because... I don't know. I think it's because he likes someone, but he won't tell me who. Dustin and Lucas are mad at me for not knowing who Will likes, El is mad at me because she thinks I'm using her, and Troy expects me to get El to kiss me in front of him or else he's going to try to steal her away and he's torment me and my friends for the rest of time. Everyone's mad at me, and worst of all, I have no clue why!" Mike gushed, rivulets of tears falling down his cheeks.

Jonathan frowned. "You... you don't know who Will likes?"

Mike watched the warning look that Nancy gave Jonathan. Mike threw his hands up in exasperation. "Does everyone know who Will likes but me?"

Jonathan opened and closed his mouth like a guppy, but Nancy replied swiftly, "Yes."

Mike's eyes went wide with disbelief. "Are you kidding? Will you tell me who it is?"

The corners of Jonathan's mouth turned down. "Are you sure you don't already know, Mike?"

"What?" Mike said. "Of course I don't know. Why would I ask you if I already knew?"

Nancy bit her lip then said, "Are you sure you don't know, Mike? Really, think about it. Is there anyone Will knows that he treats differently than other people? Like, more special? Or that he comes to for help?"

Mike thought for a moment. Will, despite being such a good person, didn't have many friends. Just him, Dustin, Lucas, and El.

It couldn't be El because Will viewed her as a sister and a sister only. He did love El, sure, but not in a romantic way. And he didn't go to her for advice or anything. He looked out for her, and she looked out for him, but in the same way that Jonathan looked out for the both of them. So it wasn't El.

Dustin and Lucas were obviously just friends to Will. Dustin and

Lucas were so close these days that they were practically like the same entity, sharing thoughts and feelings through a single words or loaded gaze. Mike missed them a bit, missed them all being like that. El had thrown the friend group off-kilter a bit, but they had settled into a comfortable structure now, and Mike knew that they all had each other's backs, and in a strange way, were closer than ever. But it seemed unlikely that Will would have a crush on one of them and not the other, and having a crush on both would be odd. Plus, Dustin and Lucas both knew who Will liked, and if it was one of them, Mike thought he would surely know who.

That left him. Mike. Did... did Will like him? That didn't seem possible.

Mike let out a laugh, but it was forced. "You... you aren't suggesting that Will likes *me*, are you?"

Nancy and Jonathan didn't say anything, they only waited for the information to register with Mike.

"That's- that's crazy. That's *insane*. He couldn't like *me*, right?" Mike said. He waited a moment before adding. "*Right?*"

Nancy spoke, just trying to fill the void, but Mike quickly cut her off. "Oh god. *Oh god*. I... jesus. Why didn't he tell me?"

Mike looked around, eyes pleading, at Jonathan and Nancy, hoping they would give him some sort of information to give him peace of mind. They offered nothing.

Mike swallowed, renewed tears starting to gather in his eyes, and he stood up. "I'm... I'm going to go. I need to think."

He started to walk out of Nancy's room. "Mike," Nancy protested weakly. "Mike! Wait!"

But Mike left. As he was walking, he heard Nancy say to Jonathan, "We shouldn't have told him. Not now."

Jonathan replied. "He would have found out eventually."

Mike locked himself in his room, then shed his shoes and climbed

under the covers of his bed fully clothed. He stared blankly at the folds of the blanket, silently reassessing every interaction he'd ever had with Will.

The night Will had gotten abducted by the Demogorgon, he'd confessed to Mike that he hadn't rolled a high enough number on the dice to live. Did he only tell Mike because he was naturally an honest person, or was it because he wanted to be honest with Mike because he liked him? Mike had noticed Will's cheeks pinking, but he had assumed it was from the cold.

Every time the boys all had a movie night together, Will would sit next to Mike. Every time Will seemed to mysteriously migrate closer to Mike until their sides were pressed together firmly. Every once in awhile their pinkies would touch. Once Will had accidentally covered Mike's hand with his own, but then quickly apologized and removed it. One time Will had fallen asleep on Mike's shoulder, smiling faintly.

Even more recently, when Troy had teased Will in the bathroom, Will had pressed his face into the juncture between Mike's shoulder blades, hands gripping Mike's shirt, hot tears stinging into Mike's back. Had that just been because Will was embarrassed, or was it also because he had wanted to be close to Mike?

Most of all, Mike wondered how he hadn't realized. In retrospect, it was obvious that Will had liked him. He expressed it in shy, subtle ways, as was typical of Will. Little touches, little blushes, little confessions. Whenever Will was being picked on, he would run to his knight in shining armor, to Mike, to protect him.

Mike felt terrible. He was closer to Will in a different way than the other boys, in a specialeder way. Mike always felt comfortable telling Will anything, everything. Every thought, every secret, every thing to go through his brain. And this whole time, had he not been seeing just how Will cared about him? In a different way, a specialeder way?

What bugged Mike the most was how long Will had put up with Mike being clueless and careless about his feelings for El before breaking down. For months, *months*, Mike had been talking to Will about El. Will had been the one to make Mike realize that El could and did feel the same way about him. Mike couldn't *imagine* how much that must

have taken him to not break down as the person he liked asked how to get their own crush. It must have been torture, and Mike had inflicted it on one of his best friends.

Mike hated that he didn't know what to do now. How was he supposed to approach this? His best friend liked him, romantically, and Mike didn't feel the same way. Mike wasn't as weird as some people about people being gay or anything. In fact, he had suspected Will might be for a while. But he knew for a fact that he wasn't. Mike liked girls. Specifically, Mike liked El. But Will liked Mike, and that made things weird.

Instead of having cleared up his issues and knowing what to do, he had even more problems than before. He needed advice. He needed backup.

He needed the unstoppable team of Dustin/Lucas.

And an eggo. He needed an eggo and a good cry.

And then he needed advice from his friendly neighborhood amoeba, Dustin/Lucas.

Author's Note: Part 2 out soon!

18. Chapter 15 Part 2

Author's Note: Here's part two!

Elsewhere, El was flabbergasted as she stood in front of Troy.

"What brings you here?" Troy sneered, gesturing an arm about grandly. "To my humble abode?"

"I got lost." El muttered.

"Lost?" Troy asked, a little taken aback. He had probably been expecting a different answer. One probably involving "*You. Me. Sexy time.*" Considering his premonitions of El, that wouldn't have been unheard of to him.

"Do you... can you give me directions home?" El asked.

Troy's eyebrows drew together in a concerned fashion. "Uh... sure. Do you know the street name? I can... I don't know... write you directions? Like, on a map or something?" He stepped back into the house a bit, hand grasping the door frame. "STEVE! DO WE HAVE A MAP?"

"I DON'T THINK SO! WHY?" Steve screamed back.

Troy shook his head a bit, then realizing his brother couldn't see that, shouted back. "NEVERMIND!"

El rubbed her arm, not knowing what to do. Shakily, she started to say, "It's okay. I guess I can find a way back-"

Troy cut her off. "I could bike you." Then he seemed to realize how that sounded nice, and then he tried to harden his expression. "If I have too. Which, obviously, I don't want to have to do. But if I have to I will. 'Cuz you're pretty. And stuff." Troy trailed off, frowning and blushing hard at his awkwardness. (A/N: HOLD UP SHIPPERS. EL AND TROY ARE NOT GOING TO EVEN BE HINTED AT BEING TOGETHER. SO STOP IN YOUR TRACKS FRIENDS. NOW, CONTINUE.) He was at a loss for words. He took a moment to gather

himself before staring again. "If I biked you around until you saw something you recognized, do you think you'll be able to find your way home?"

El nodded, heart swelling hopefully. Looks like she might find a way home after all.

"Okay. Okay then." Troy said. He leaned into the house again and shouted at Steve, "I'M GOING FOR A RIDE. I'LL BE BACK SOON."

"WITH THE GIRL?" Steve yelled back.

Troy shot a look at El before screaming, "YEAH."

"HAVE FUN!" Steve shouted, then added, "BUT NOT TOO MUCH FUN!"

"Oh,ahaha. Funny. Also, unlikely." Troy muttered. He stepped out of the house, onto the front step beside El, then closed the door behind him. He gestured at El to follow him. "Come on..." His voice trailed off, realizing he didn't know the name of the girl he was about to be transporting. He heard her name before, but in the past all he had called her was "*The Fairy's Sister*" or "*Frogface's fake girlfriend*".

"El." El supplied.

Troy nodded like he had known all along. "Yeah. Come on, El. Let's get you home."

Troy led her to his bike and got on, scooting forward so El could sit on the back of the seat like she did with Mike. She perched behind him, feet settled on the spokes of the bike, and then Troy set off. El held on to him as little as she could, fingers gripping Troy's jacket into the little fists of her hands. She was immensely uncomfortable traveling so intimately with Troy, but there wasn't really any other option. She didn't have to like it though, this mouth breather biking her along.

Then it occurred to her that this wasn't really a mouth breather thing to do. This was nice. This was considerate. This was completely unlike the behavior she would normally associate with Troy. Why was he being so... good? This was making El rethink everything she

knew about Troy.

And it was quite weird.

They biked around, down streets and alleys, for seven minutes and forty-two seconds (El had counted) before they saw something El recognized. "THERE!" She shouted, so loudly and unexpectedly that Troy swerved for a moment and muttered *Jesus*. "Mirkwood!" She proclaimed, triumphant.

"Mirk-*what*?" Troy asked, swerving onto the narrow road. "That can't possibly be real."

"The name is made-up." El informed him. "But the street is real."

Troy raised an eyebrow. "Well, I know that. I mean, we're on it, so it must be real." He took a moment to consider. "Or maybe we aren't. God. That's some meta shit."

El laughed at that. She didn't know what *meta* meant, or if Troy had used the word right (it didn't sound like it), but the way Troy had said it sounded funny. Troy turned to smile at her brightly, then returned to facing the road. They bumped along the road for a few more minutes until they rolled up to the driveway of El's home. The gravel crunched under the tires as Troy skidded to a stop. He braced his foot on the ground so El could get off, then he got off himself. He dropped his bike onto the ground and shoved his hands into his pockets, walking towards the house, El right behind him.

Someone had left the blind to the dining room open, and El watched as Troy spotted Will through the window. Troy's shoulders lifted towards his ears and patches of red appeared on his cheeks. He was *blushing*. It seemed like such a foreign expression on Troy. Nothing like she would expect from a mouth breather. El decided right then and there that they and all misjudged Troy. He wasn't quite as bad as he seemed.

El continued to observe as Troy's eyes stayed softly on Will's form. Will held his walkie talkie up to his ear, but his mouth wasn't moving, so El assumed he was listening in on a conversation. She didn't think that her brother would be one to eavesdrop, but people

kept surprising her today.

Troy was still looking at Will, still blushing a bit, so El felt it safe to come to a conclusion and then to voice said conclusion. "You like Will."

Troy snapped out of his daze. "*What?*"

El nodded thoughtfully. "You like him. As... as more than a friend."

"I do *not*." Troy insisted. "First of all, that would be really fucking gay. And I am *not* gay. I like girls and... and boobs! Yeah. Like... like those!" He gestured vaguely at El's chest and El's eyebrows scrunched together in confusion. He tilted his head a bit, inspecting her, and El had to repress the urge to cross her arms over her chest. "Well, not yours. But-but that totally isn't my fault! It's because you don't have much boob in the first place."

"Hey!" El protested. She wasn't sure what she was protesting, but she felt it was the right thing to do.

"I... I'm not gay!" Troy frowned and stomped his foot. El could see the repressed frustration and confusion in his eyes. "I'm not! I don't like boys, not like that, and I especially don't like your fairy brother!"

"I don't know what that means." El said. "Gay. Or fairy," she clarified. "But if it means that you like my brother, then it is okay. If that is how you feel, it is okay." El rested her hand on Troy's shoulder, trying to transfer her acceptance of his physically. "How you feel, and who you like, that is for you. It is yours. Your feelings. And it is okay." El offered Troy a sweet smile.

Troy stared at El for a moment, before sniffling and starting to cry. It was like El had broken a dam and suddenly all of the things Troy had been keeping from himself came flooding out. El pulled Troy into a hug and held his head against her shoulder as he cried.

"Please..." Troy whispered between sobs. "You... you can't tell anyone."

"Okay." El said. She could keep a secret, but she hoped that it wouldn't stay one. She wanted Troy to accept himself. She wanted

him to be happy. "Why are you a mouth breather to my friends?" She asked.

El felt Troy swallow against her shoulder. He pulled away from the hug to stand in front of El and rubbed the back of his neck boyishly. "I'm... I'm sorry, El." Tears stained his cheeks, little lines streaming from his eyes. "I don't... I don't know why I do it. I never meant to. I just... I guess I don't... I don't want to like Will. I don't. It's unnatural, right? For a boy to like a boy?"

El considered. "I don't think so. You like who you like, and that is your business. If that is what you feel, then it can't be unnatural."

Troy nodded, slowly at first, then quicker as her words registered. "Yeah. Yeah. I guess you're right." Troy swallowed. "He'll never like me back though. Will." Troy flinched at the name as though it hurt him. "I've been awful to him. I'd hate me if I was him."

El pursed her lips. She thought of her brother as a very understanding and forgiving person. And Troy was nice. But only if you got to know him. "I think he might. If you give it time. Maybe." She didn't know if Will liked boys as more than friends, but she thought that if he did, he might like Troy. Eventually.

Troy smile was slow but blinding in its quiet hopefulness. "I hope so."

They stood in silence for a moment. It was comfortable, signaling the closer of the topic.

"I have something to apologize for." Troy said. "Well, many things," he amended. "But this is particularly about you. I'm sorry I've been mean to you, and that I've called you names. It wasn't fair of me, especially because I didn't know you before. You are quite nice, and weirdly, you don't seem to know a lot, but you always seem to know when to say the right thing."

El ran through Troy's words, trying to nitpick for meaning without Mike there to translate. "Thank you?" She answered, unsure if that was the correct response.

"Also, I'm sorry for saying that Mike is using you. It isn't true. He

really likes you. Also, I'm going to call off the deal with Mike."

El fixed Troy with a confused look, and Troy's eyebrows shot up. "Oh, god, I didn't think Mike would actually not tell you! We had a uh... deal, you see. Mike was supposed to get you to kiss him in front of me, and then I wouldn't make fun of him and his friends anymore. I made the deal because I wanted to try to get back at Nancy. And," Troy dug in his pocket for a moment before bringing out a lump of cash. "I'm sorry I took your money. Here." He handed it to her.

El accepted the money but frowned at Troy's statement. "Get back at Nancy? Why?"

Troy sighed and shifted from foot to foot. He decided to be blunt in his response, seeming to understand El would understand that the best. "My brother's depressed. Because Nancy broke up with him to date your brother. So thought, maybe if I broke up you and Mike, it would... I don't know... snap him out of his daze? It was stupid, I know, and mean, and unhelpful, and unnecessary, but I was desperate. I just wish she would at least talk to him. He needs a friend, one that doesn't come from a bottle. I'm sorry for that though. I'm sorry for so many things, El." He let out a wry laugh. "The worst thing about this is that I've told you more about myself than anyone else in the world, and I've only really known you for about an hour."

El shook her head at Troy. "That isn't sad. It's brave. I have done bad things too. But, I made friends, good friends, and now I do good things." El smiled at Troy. "I will be your friend, and you can start to do good things too."

"I'd like that." Troy smiled, and it was a neat, genuine thing. El liked that smile.

"Good, then-" El was cut off by the front door being thrown open.

Will stood in the door way, wearing pajamas and bunny slippers. He looked all at once large and imposing form his fierce expression, but also small and adorable because of his slight frame and ridiculous get up. "What are you doing here?" Will glared at Troy. He looked like a rabbit trying to look mean.

"I—" Troy voice was harsh and had the bite of a mean comment in the making, but he stopped himself, swallowed, and restarted his sentence. His cheeks were uttered with blush when he registered Will's adorable outfit. "Y-your sister got lost, so I took her home."

Will looked to El for confirmation. "Is that true, El?"

El nodded.

"Fine. Thanks for dropping her off." Will said. He didn't sound grateful.

Troy nodded, and El could see in his eyes he wanted more from this exchange, but he knew he wasn't going to get it. "Of course." He said. He turned to El. "Bye, El. Thank you ."

El nodded and gave Troy a quick hug, which surprised both of the boys, and then said to Troy. "We should talk again soon."

Troy swallowed and nodded. "Okay. Bye, El. Bye, Will."

Will only gave answer by way of a terse nod, then ushered El inside the house and shut the door.

Author's Note: Part Three out soon!

19. Chapter 15 Part 3

Author's Note: Here's Part Three!

Will locked the door and scurried to the window in his ratty slippers. El watched as Troy offered him a weak wave, paired with a broken smile. Will's eyebrows pulled together, but he waved awkwardly back.

"Why is he not... being an *asshole*?" Will asked, voice a little dazed.

El held her tongue, knowing why Troy was being nice to Will. Instead, she said, "He is nice."

Will's eyes widened. "Not a mouth breather?"

"Not a mouth breather." El confirmed.

Will nodded shakily. El could see he didn't really believe that, but he wanted to. There was something else in his expression though. Something was bothering him.

"What's wrong?" El asked.

El watched as her brother quickly masked his expression. It was so odd to see Will do. He was an incredibly open and honest person. "Nothing." Will said. "It's nothing."

"Nothing is a something. It is a nothing, which is a something." El tried to reason. "So your nothing must be a something. So, what is your nothing?"

Will looked a bit taken aback, then muttered something like *what an abstract way of thinking* and *Mike, always Mike*. Will swallowed. "I overheard something." He admitted.

"What?" El tilted her head to the side, a strangely bird-like expression.

"I... Can I tell you later?" Will said, rubbing his neck uncomfortably. "I still need to think about it."

"Okay," El said. Then as an afterthought, she held out her pinky like Dustin and Lucas had taught her. *Pinky Promise.* "Promise?"

Will giggled and hooked his pinky around hers. "Promise."

Then he went to his room. El stood in place for a minute, wondering what she should do. Finally, she went over to the desk and used to crayons to draw. She drew herself in the wig and pink dress, Mike next to her on her right. She didn't know what she was going to do about Mike. She missed him, and she wanted to talk to him, and she wanted to *understand*. She knew he wasn't using her, Troy had confirmed that, but still. She wanted to fix things. And then she wanted to kiss him again.

She drew Will next to Mike, and then Lucas and Dustin on her left. She was finishing coloring in the iconic red and blue of Dustin's hat, when she decided to include one more person.

Right behind Will, sporting a smile, she drew Troy.

Just to see how it looked.

She inspected the picture for a moment before smiling at her handiwork and tacking it to the fridge.

Will sat on his bed, staring off into space.

This is what Will had overheard on the walkie talkie:

Mike: Guys... Dustin. Lucas. I know you're there. Over.

Lucas: We're here.

Mike: Lucas! I won't have this conversation with you again! Say over when you're done. Over.

Lucas: Fine. Fine! We're here. Over!

Mike: I realized. Over.

Dustin: Realized what? Over.

Mike: Who Will likes. Over.

static

Mike: Guys? It's me, isn't it?

static

Mike: Isn't it?

Lucas: Yeah.

Mike: Shit.

Dustin: Yeah.

Mike: What do I do?

Author's Note: I hope you enjoyed this extra-extra long chapter full of plot twists! I love you all, and I hope you liked this chapter! I know I got a wee controversial with the whole Troy thing, but I yearned to give him some sort of depth. I hoped you enjoyed reading this chapter as much as I enjoyed writing it!

20. Chapter 16

Author's Note: I'm a dweeb. Enjoy this chapter. Be my friend. Please comment. Love me.

Depending on where you started this story, it was about Troy Harrington.

Tallish, curly-ish brown-haired, Troy Harrington.

Depending on how you viewed him, he was either incredible, or, more likely, an asshole.

He was either fiercely loyal, caring and thoughtful, and hopelessly and confusingly in love with a bunny of a boy.

Or he held a boy at the business end of a knife, made another boy jump off a cliff, and called people names that made them cry.

Depending on how you viewed him, he was good or he was bad. He was pure as the fresh-fallen snow, or he was darker than the shadows under your bed.

Troy did not think like to think that he was a bad person.

He had done bad things, but that didn't make him a bad person. And he didn't want to be bad, not anymore.

He wanted to be happy.

Was that such a selfish thought?

He wanted to have friends, good friends, real friends, like El and Mike and Dustin and Lucas and Will. He wanted to play dorky board games and watch Star Wars and eat eggos. He wanted to bike in the cold and give his windbreaker to Will. He wanted to smile and blush and think and prove and kiss and try.

And Will.

He wanted to hold Will's hand and he wanted Will to want that too.

He wanted so many things.

But none of them were going to happen if he didn't start doing something.

This time, this time, he would do something good.

Depending on where you started this story, it was about Dustin and Lucas.

A two-headed organism, Lucas thinking and Dustin feeling, together they were unstoppable.

They liked to pretend that they were the same person sometimes. In truth, they were two parts of the same whole. A singular entity somehow separated but always finding it's way back to each other.

They understood that people saw them as background characters, useful for comic relief and the occasional sage advice. They didn't mind, they liked it like that.

Watching was what they were good at. *Understanding* would be a better word for it, though.

Will had never told either of them outright that he liked Mike. It was a sudden thing, and so blatantly obvious that they never had needed to discuss it. One day, Mike had bumped into Will's arm, then apologized and given Will his signature doe-eyed gleaming-smile charming grin.

Unsurprising, Will had melted. Blush had creped up to his cheeks and in no time at all, he was bright red and confused. Mike had already walked away, leaving Will with Dustin and Lucas.

Lucas raised an eyebrow at Dustin, and Dustin opened his mouth to comment on it, but Will cut him off before he could say anything. "Don't tell Mike." Will said.

That was their first secret.

Their second secret was messier, and much more complicated.

One day, during their study hall, they were collecting stones behind the school for Lucas's wrist rocket. They were right behind a window into the library, and through the window, they could see Will pulling books from a shelf.

Troy was in front of the window, obscured from view from the inside by a bush, quietly watching.

Dustin spotted him first, and tugged on Lucas's sleeve to warn him. The two of them floated over to Troy, Dustin's pale skin and Lucas's chocolate glow rendered them eerie, like horror movie twins.

"Why are you spying on Will?" Lucas asked, tilting his head to the side. His voice was level, but venom was bubbling beneath the surface.

Troy jumped up, terror evident across his features, but his cheeks were pinking.

Dustin frowned, understanding dawning on his features. "Do you... like Will?"

Troy turned red, opening his mouth to protest, but then he stopped himself. He had been caught, what else could he possibly be doing, what excuse could he possibly use? He swallowed and growled, "If you tell anyone, I'll kill you."

That was their second secret.

Depending on where you started this story, it was about Will Byers.

Sensitive, small, unbearably kind and unselfish.

He gave advice and hugs, he was a shoulder to cry on, and, at times, a doormat to wipe your feet on.

He observed things and people. Mostly people.

Mostly Mike.

His best friend, his sister's boyfriend, his secret, dirty little crush.

Expect for it wasn't so secret anymore.

Mike knew, he knew, he knew and Will, strangely, didn't want him too.

Will was sensible, he knew Mike would find out eventually, but this was awful.

Because Will wasn't so sure if he liked Mike anymore.

Mike, glorious, stunning, thoughtful Mike, was as worthy of a crush as any person in the world, but Will no longer had a crush on him. Because Mike was so unbelievably happy with El, even if he kept fucking it up. Will knew that they were perfect for each other, Mike got all starry-eyed when he talked about her. He was in *love* with her. Will was not going to get in the way of that.

And It killed him whenever Mike asked for relationship advice. Before, it was because Will couldn't bear having to deal with the boy he liked asking for advice in a relationship that wasn't with Will. Now though, Will had realized that he was annoyed because Mike didn't *need* advice. He just needed to get it through his thick, beautiful skull that he just needed to talk to El, and everything would work out.

Will was confused. The end of his feelings for Mike came to an end as suddenly and certainly as they began.

As soon as he heard Mike wondering about what he would do about Will's feelings for him, Will had realized that he didn't have any.

This was confirmed when Troy dropped off El.

Troy's presence and confusing kindness was just what Will had needed to confirm that yes, things were not as he had predicted or planned necessarily, but that didn't make them bad. Will not liking Mike was going to be for the best.

Plus, Will had liked the way Troy stared at him and his bunny slippers.

Depending on where you started the story, it was about Steve Harrington.

The tall, muscle, charming man of Ms. Nancy Wheeler's dreams.

Until she broke up with him because, frankly, he was kind of an asshole. Not quite as big of an asshole as he could have been though, but that didn't make him any less asshole-y.

The princess had broken up with the prince to date the photographer.

Steve understood that, understood why Nancy had left him for someone better, and Jonathan *was* better.

But now he was all alone.

He had ended his other friendships just to be with her (they were even more asshole-y than himself, but at least they were something), and while he got that she didn't want to be with him, he at least wanted to be friends with her, and hopefully Jonathan.

Instead, when Nancy broke it off with him, she stopped talking to him entirely. He understood this too, she thought it might be too painful for him to be around her and Jonathan. It would be, but he would take some pain and discomfort over this, this loneliness.

Without Nancy and Jonathan, he had no one.

So, he drank, and in his alcohol-fuzzy moments he confided in his little brother, or his bedroom wall, or his pillow. He cried a lot more than he used to. He was miserable.

He didn't know how to fix anything.

Depending on where you started the story, it was about Jonathan Byers and Nancy Wheeler. Friends in love, with a messy ex in the background.

They had each other.

It was enough.

They wanted a friend.

But the one they wanted wasn't coming to school, and according to the rumors he was drinking himself silly and it was all their fault.

So, they decided to pay him a visit.

Depending on where you started the story, it was about Eleven. Or Jane Ives, or El, or Eleven Byers, or El Byers, or El. Whatever you called her, she was still a beautiful girl with a strange power.

And not the telekinesis thing.

She had the completely not magically power of being able to see a person's inner goodness.

And she saw goodness in everyone around her.

She saw it in Will, the gentle warmth in him, and in Dustin and Lucas, the chaotic calm of the watchful, and in Nancy and Jonathan, the syrupy in love, and in Troy, the hopeful and confused. She saw the most in Mike though. He was blunt and quick to frustration, but also sweet and kind, thoughtful and honest, protective and loving. He completed her.

She needed to talk to him, but she wanted him to talk to her first.

She knew that they would work everything out because they were Mike and Eleven. The spaces weren't even necessary, they were more like *MikeAndEleven*.

They were one, and they were in love.

Depending on where you started this story, it was about Mike Wheeler.

Charming, nerdy, cute, with melty puppy-dog eyes.

Mike Wheeler, president of Hawkins Middle AV Club, with his best friends Will, Dustin, and Lucas. Mike Wheeler, boyfriend of the lovely

El Byers, not-so-secret ex-crush of Will Byers, enemy (?) of Troy Harrington, brother of Nancy Wheeler.

Mike Wheeler, in love, messing everything up, then fixing it. Broken, then fixed, and better than ever.

He had a lot that he had broken. But he was determined, so he had a lot to fix.

He would do it, like he always did.

Author's Note: Thanks, y'all! Sorry it's taken so long and not much happened, but I promise you the next chapter is going to be super action-y! See you soon ;)

Kisses,

Chattré

21. Chapter 17

Author's Note: We're almost at the end of the road my friends, 5-8 more chapters left! Hope you enjoy this one!

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" Jonathan asked, his fingers brushing Nancy's elbow carefully.

Nancy sucked in a breath and shook her head. "Nope. But we're doing it anyway."

"Okay." Jonathan said, bouncing from foot to foot anxiously. "He might be drunk."

Nancy bit her lip and grabbed Jonathan's hand, squeezing briefly. "He *will* be drunk. He's been every single day at school, when he *has* come to school."

"Yeah," Jonathan said. "He'll be drunk. You sure you want to do this?"

Nancy swallowed and nodded. "We're here, aren't we? Let's do this."

Jonathan nodded and reached forward, pressing the doorbell once.

They were in front of Steve Harrington's house, intent on attempting to mend their relationship and offer their friendship to Steve. They had both noticed Steve's ungraceful decline, and felt guilty about it. He may not have been the best in the past, but he had *tried* to fix things, and that counted for something.

The door slammed open, and Steve's little brother Troy stood in the door frame. Though he was smaller than Jonathan and Nancy, his presence was large, and fairly pissed off when he saw Nancy and Jonathan.

"You broke up with my brother." Troy stated, crossing his arms.

Nancy shifted. "Well... yes."

"And you haven't talked to him since. That's just rude. And you," Troy

changed his gaze so he was glaring up at Jonathan, who had the decency to look a bit shaken. "You're Will's brother. Has he..." Troy's cheeks pinked, but his gaze sharpened as if pretending he wasn't blushing. "Has he mentioned me? Troy?"

Jonathan hesitated for a moment, then said, "I... don't think so? Are you friends?"

Troy broke his gaze with Jonathan to look at his own shoes. They were sneakers, clean and blackish blue. "No, we aren't friends. Maybe soon though."

Nancy exchanged a glance with Jonathan. Understanding passed between them.

"You like my brother?" Jonathan asked carefully, softly.

Troy stiffened. He stepped out of the doorway. "You can come in. Steve's in his room, you know where it is. Knock or you might regret it." Troy turned on his heel to go, but then turned back to say, "I don't like your brother. Not like that."

"It's okay." Jonathan said. "I won't tell him."

Troy frowned and sat onto the floor once, bitterly, as if he hated that everyone could just *know* except for the one person he wanted to. Then he walked away.

"C'mon," Nancy squeezed Jonathan's hand, tugging him gently toward the stairwell. "His room is this way."

"Should we go after Troy?" Jonathan asked, a little confused by Troy's behavior.

Nancy shook her head. "That boy just needs a good think. Let's go talk to Steve."

"Okay." Jonathan said, and allowed Nancy to pull him up the stairs. He tried not to think about how Nancy knew where Steve's room was. She had chosen him in the end, after all, and he was nothing if not grateful for that.

Nancy was the one to knock. She rapped the door with her knuckles. "Steve?" She called.

"Come in... ya know, if you really want to." Steve's voice came, gravelly with alcohol and sleep deprivation.

Jonathan pushed open the door, and the door swept empty cans and cigarette butts across the floor. The room smelled overwhelmingly of beer and smoke. Steve was sat on the floor directly across from the door, his back against the crease of the wall. His hair was greasy and disheveled, and his eyes were bloodshot, and he wore only a left sock. In his right hand he had an empty bottle, and in his left, an unlit cigarette.

Jonathan and Nancy cautiously entered the room, both in a bit of a shock at just how far gone Steve was. The ceiling was smudgy with soot.

Steve regarded them for a moment, then looked down at the cigarette. He put down the bottle, and held the cigarette reverently between his fingers. With fascination, he said, "It's nice, isn't it? Pretty? I don't want it though." He snapped it in half and threw it on the floor. "I'm tired, guys. So tired."

All the pride and power seemed to have been sapped from Steve. Was nothing sacred? Jonathan and Nancy both looked down at Steve with sadness and pity.

"Let's get you cleaned up, okay?" Nancy said, voice soft.

Steve said nothing, just nodded. He was done.

Nancy turned to Jonathan. "You take him to shower, alright? I'm going to get Troy to help me clean up this room."

Jonathan nodded, then let go of Nancy's hand and instead offered it to Steve. "Let's go, yeah?"

Jonathan pulled Steve up, and Steve leaned on him the entire walk to the bathroom. Nancy watched them go, then called out, "Troy!"

She heard the trudging of feet until the boy stood in Steve's

doorframe. "Yeah?"

"We're cleaning this up. Where are your cleaning supplies?"

"Downstairs. Why?" Troy asked.

"We're gonna fix your brother, that's why."

Troy smiled, tears pricking in his eyes. "Took you long enough."

Jonathan lead Steve to the bathroom, and lucky it was separated into two sections, so the shower was not in view from the other room. Jonathan didn't think that Steve would be able to be alone without at least some emotional support, but the last thing he wanted was to see his girlfriend's ex-boyfriend's genitalia.

"Steve. Steve, I'm going to turn on the shower for you, okay?" Jonathan spotted a cup on the counter, and he rinsed it before filling it up and handing it to Steve. "Drink this, okay? We need to try to somber you up."

Steve acknowledged Jonathan by taking the cup and starting to sip.

Jonathan started the shower, the hissing of the water cut through their silence.

"Do you hate me?" Jonathan asked quickly, half hoping Steve wouldn't hear him with the water running.

"No." Steve croaked. "Do you hate me?"

Jonathan shook his head. "No."

"I'm..." Steve interrupted himself by taking a sip. "Wow. Water is good. Okay. I'm happy for you two, really. It's just a little hard, you know? 'Cuz it reminds me that I don't have anyone."

"I get that." Jonathan murmured, remembering back to before he had met Nancy and even Steve.

"No, no you don't. You always had Will. That's someone." Steve said.

"Well, you have Troy. We both had someone. That doesn't mean we couldn't be lonely, though." Jonathan said. "I'm not lonely anymore, though. You won't be either, okay?" Jonathan frowned, rubbing his elbow. "I don't really like people. In general. But even when you were being a mega-asshole, I could never really hate you. I understood you too much."

Steve took another long sit and set his empty glass on the rim of the counter. Then, he stuck out his hand for Jonathan to shake. "Friends?"

Jonathan raised an eyebrow. "What?"

"Don't expect me to do any lovey-dovey shit, Byers. Shake it or leave it."

Jonathan cracked a grin and shook Steve's hand. "Friends."

"Now, get out. I'm not taking a shower if there's a chase you can see my junk." Steve said callously. Jonathan smiled and left, happiness seeping in. Some of Steve was returning to him, and for some reason, Jonathan enjoyed having the cocky side of Steve back. It was amusing.

They were going to get along just fine.

Author's Note: Hope you enjoyed this chapter! See you soon guys!

22. Chapter 18, Part 1

Author's Note: I'm banging out chapters so I can procrastinate finishing my application to CSSSA. *guess who's a disaster* *surprise surprise it's Chattr*

El was in her room, when she heard the noise.

A clicking, maybe a tapping sort of noise, eerie and sharp.

Immediately, El was on edge. Could it be the Demogorgon, or some other creature from the Upside Down still haunting them?

The noise came again, and this time El could pinpoint where it came from. A tap tap, something at her window. She approached it cautiously, not knowing what to expect. She was about to peer out, but something hit the window with a loud thunk! and the window shattered. El jumped back, avoiding the spray of glass, and the shards piled on the floor.

"Shit!" A voice called.

El picked her way around the glass to the window, and came face to face with Mike. He was holding a handful of pebbles and a guilty look on his face.

"You broke my window." El observed, her voice measured and calm.

"I didn't mean too! I guess the rock was too heavy or something-" Mike started.

"Why would you throw rocks at my window?" She asked.

Mike swallowed. "Well, I was trying to get your attention. It's..." Mike shrugged his shoulders up, blushing hard in embarrassment. "It's supposed to be romantic."

"If you want to get my attention, just ring the doorbell." El said.
"Why... why do you want to get my attention?"

"Because, I need to talk to you." Mike said. "You're mad at me, right? I'm here to apologize."

"I'm not mad at you." El said.

"You're... not?" Mike asked, confused.

"No. Troy explained to me." El said, but Mike cut her off.

"Troy? Wait, when did you talk to him?"

"Yesterday. I got lost when I ran away, and he biked me home." El explained.

"God, he didn't do anything to you, right?" Mike asked, worry evident in his tone.

El's eyebrows furrowed. "What?"

Mike hesitated, then scrubbed and hand over his face. "Um... can I come in?"

El nodded, and Mike started to walk toward the front door, stopped, and then changed his mind and climbed through the broken window, first dusting the shards of glass off the window frame to avoid getting cut. Once he landed on the floor with a thump, he cautiously approached El, like somehow she was fragile and he was afraid to break her.

"El, you need to tell me if he did anything. Like, tried to kiss you or something?" Mike said, his voice apprehensively and soft.

"Troy didn't do anything. He's a good person." El said.

"What?" Mike looked shocked and mildly affronted. "No, he isn't. He's a mouthbreather. He's bad, El!"

"You're wrong." El said. "He's good, and I like him. He's my friend."

"Your friend? El, he made me jump off a cliff! He threatened to remove Dustin's teeth with a knife! He's bad."

"No," El insisted. "He isn't bad. He had done bad things. That doesn't make him bad. Papa, papa was bad. The Demogorgon was bad. Troy did bad things. You did bad things too, and so did I. That doesn't make us bad, it just means we have done bad things. They are different, Mike."

"That doesn't excuse anything, though. When I did bad things, or when you did bad things, we always had a reason, and even then we apologized. Troy is just mean for the fun of it. I don't think the words 'I'm sorry' are even in his vocabulary." Mike huffed, angry and confused as to why El was defending his nemesis.

"Troy does have a reason. I think he was using his reason wrong before (Author's Note: It's called projecting, sweet cheeks). But he is ready to be good, and I want to help him." El said.

Mike swallowed, and rolled his words around in his head for a bit, not wanting to start a fight. He had come here to apologize and make amends with El, but so far he had just broken her window and started to fight with her about the morality of his enemy. But, above all else, Mike trusted El's judgement. She was smart, and saw the true goodness in people, so if she said Troy was good, then he was good, no questions asked. "He wants to be good? Are you sure?" Mike said.

"Yes." El replied without hesitation. "He wants to be good and have good friends, like you and me and Dustin and Lucas."

"What about Will?" Mike asked, eyebrow's furrowing.

El stopped for a moment, not sure how she could tiptoe around this without revealing the truth. "Will is different."

"Different for you or for him?" Mike asked, curiosity bubbling up in his chest.

"For him." El said, cleanly and finally, ending any attempt to further the subject. Mike knew that tone, and he knew not to push it farther. He decided that was something to think about later.

"He wants to be friends with us, though?" Mike asked.

"Yes," El said. "And I want to be friends with him."

Had to split this up cuz my computer's a lil butt, but more coming v soon!

23. Chapter 18, Part 2

"Okay." Mike said. "We'll try, then. But, he must apologize to us. I won't ask why he did what he did. You know why, right?" El nodded. "Was it a good reason?" She nodded again, with more zeal this time. "Well then, that's enough for me. He just needs to apologize to us all. Especially Will."

"Especially Will." El chorused, nodding more in agreement.

Mike snickered a bit. "You can... you can stop nodding so much." El looked a little shocked at his words, like she hadn't realized how much she was nodding, which made Mike laugh more. "You're adorable, El."

"What is a-door-a-bell?" She asked, confusion evident across her face.

"It's like... cute, you know? Like pretty, but squishier. Like, it makes me want to squeeze your cheeks. I like it." Mike said, his face breaking out into a smile.

"Oh. Thank you." El beamed, and before Mike could stop himself, he leaned in and kissed her lightly, no more than a brush of lips. He pulled back with a blush.

"Sorry." He muttered.

"Why are you sorry?" El asked, eyebrows furrowing.

"Is it okay, then? If I kiss you?" Mike asked. He didn't know what may have changed, but he didn't want to do anything that wasn't welcome.

"I promise." El said, smiling.

"Good." Mike grinned, reaching forward to grab El's hands. "You still want to go to the Snow Ball with me, right?"

"Yes." El said.

"Good." Mike said, then kissed El on the cheek. "I'm pretty sure my

sister's coming to pick you up soon, to go dress shopping."

"She is." El confirmed. "I like dresses."

"I like you." Mike smiled and said. Then he frowned and shuffled his feet a bit. "El, is Will here?"

"Yes," El said. "He's in his room. His music is very loud." El commented. The music *was* loud, and Mike could overhear the Clash playing faintly from somewhere in the house.

"I need to talk to him." Mike said. "Is that okay?"

"Yes," El said. "He is upset right now though. He won't tell me why. Not yet, anyway."

"I think it might be my fault." Mike sighed. "But, I'm going to try to fix it. Somehow, anyway."

"Good." El said. She then kissed him once, quickly and sweetly. "For luck." She explained.

"Thanks." Mike smiled, then waved goodbye at her as he left her room.

Mike walked to Will's room, trying to figure out what he was going to say. What could he even say to Will, knowing what he knew? Did he confront him about it? Try to make it subtle? Was he even capable of being subtle?

"Will?" Mike knocked on the door lightly. "Are you in there?"

The Clash quieted down at the sound of Mike's voice, and a moment later the doorknob turned, and there Will stood.

"Will." Mike said, almost sighing, thoughts running through his head in a blur. He had no clue what to say.

"Hi." Will said. It was strange not to see a smile on the boy's face.

"Can we... can we talk?" Mike asked.

Will nodded, then opened the door more so Mike could come in. Will walked and perched on his bed, and Mike stood before him.

"What do you want to talk about, Mike?" Will asked, but the shake in his voice betrayed his emotions. He knew exactly what was about to happen, and he didn't want to face it either.

Mike swallowed, and thought about his, frankly alarming, lack of subtlety, and decided to just get it over with, like ripping off a bandaid. *"Do you like me?"* He asked, then breathed, and tried again. "Do you, um... do you like me? Like, more than a friend?"

Will's cheeks started to color in embarrassment, and he begged himself to cool down and deal with this, but it only mad his skin hotter, so he started to frantically fan his face. Will peered up at Mike, face burning, and sighed. "Well... no." Will said hesitantly.

"You can tell me, Will." Mike said. "I'm not going to think of you any differently, okay? I'm your friend, Will. No matter what."

"That's... really nice, Mike. But... I don't like you. Not like that, not anymore." Will said. "I... I can't deny that I did. I did like you. Just, not anymore."

Mike balked. "Oh... okay." He shuffled his feet a bit in an awkward manner, then gestured vaguely to the space on the bed next to Will. "Can I... can I sit?" Will nodded, and Mike sat next to Will. "Do you want to talk about it, Will? Or, not even that. Do you want to talk about anything? You always listen to me rant. Maybe I can return the favor?" Mike's voice was tentative, he wanted Will to open up, but he didn't know what to do.

"Do you want me to talk about it?" Will asked, looking at Mike. His eyes were large and doe-like, and so pure that it made Mike want to protect his friend from anything that might remotely harm him. **(Author's Note: Protective Mike™ mode engaged!)**

"Only if you want to talk about it." Mike said carefully.

"Okay." Will took a deep breath and clenched his fists, as if preparing himself for a lengthy speech. "Okay. So, I... um... I never really

expected to like you. I never meant to. It all happened so fast, Mike, I didn't even know that I liked boys! Or anyone! It just kind of happened. I didn't like you, and then I did. And, obviously, I was too shy to do anything at first. And then, I got... taken by the Demogorgon, and you met El, and you two are perfect for each other, and you're my best friend, and she's my *sister*, and I'm wasn't going to do anything to get in the way of that. What you two have is special, and I'm so happy for you.

Anyway, I... um... I overheard you talking to Lucas and Dustin. I know that this whole me-loving-you thing is weird for you, and I know you aren't sure how to approach it. Believe me, I don't know either. I sort of wish that you hadn't found out in the first place, because by the time you found out, I didn't like you anymore.

But I guess this is better, in a way? Resolution and all. We can acknowledge this, and then move on, right?" Will finished.

"Right." Mike said. "I'm... I'm sorry. I wish I could be of more help with this. I want you to know I support you, right? I'll be the best ally/wingman/best friend ever. You've always been there for me, it's only fair I return the favor."

Will smiled. "Thanks, Mike."

Wow I hate my computer. More to come.

24. Chapter 18, Part 3

"Of course," Mike picked at a few loose threads on his pants for a moment before speaking again. "Do you think we should tell El about any of this? The whole you-and-me thing?"

Will shook his head. "I'm sure she already knows, in her way. And if she doesn't, then she probably doesn't need to. She has a lot to deal with already. If you haven't noticed, Mike, you're quite the handful. Before you even talked to her today, you broke her window. With a pebble. You're a bit of a disaster."

Mike winced. "You heard that?"

"Of course, I did." Will said. "I checked to make sure it wasn't... you know... the Demogorgon or something who broke the window. But when I saw it was you, I figured you and my sister needed some time alone. So, I talked to... never mind. It doesn't matter." Will finished hurriedly.

Mike's eyebrows drew together. "Who? You talked to who?"

"It doesn't matter." Will said.

"Will..." Mike drawled, eyeing him. "Come on. You can tell me. If you want to, that is."

"Okay, but... don't... don't get mad, okay?" Will swallowed and sighed. "I was talking to Troy on the walkie talkie. Really, he's a lot better than I thought, and he's nice, and cute and..."

"I know. El said he was a lot better than we thought." Mike said, and then his eyebrows furrowed. "Wait, did you say *cute*?"

Will's eyes widened, realizing his mistake in words, and he started to blush. "I absolutely did *not*!"

"Yes, you did!" Mike said. "Oh my god! Do you like Troy?"

"No! Mike, I literally found out he wasn't a jerk *yesterday*. I couldn't possibly like him that quickly!" Will proclaimed.

"I don't know," Mike said, thinking back to when he met Eleven. "A day can change everything."

"Oh, psh, Mike. You're being a sap, and that's coming from me. We just talked, okay? We're gonna help El pick a dress for the Snowball this afternoon." Will said.

"A dress? Can I come?" Mike asked, voice eager.

Will whacked him, a light blow against Mike's upper arm. "No! It's bad luck for a groom to see the bride in her dress before the wedding."

"Oh, shut up." Mike laughed. "We both know the real reason you don't want me to come is so you can have Troy all to yourself."

"Lies!" Will laughed, shoving Mike playfully.

Mike snorted, and was about to spout a witty retort, but then they heard the front door unlock and swing open, then the scuff of multiple pairs of feet on the floor.

"Will! El!" Came Jonathan's voice. "You guys ready? It's time to go!"

Will and Mike made for the door, and pushed it open, both of them standing in the doorway. Directly in front of them was Nancy Jonathan, Steve, and Troy.

At the sight of Mike and Will together, coming out of Will's room, alone and grinning, made Troy's eyes tighten and his mouth crease down almost imperceptibly. But Will noticed, and he took a fraction of a step away from Mike. And Troy noticed that, too.

"Hey," Troy said, a smile blooming across his features.

"Hi." Will smiled back, shy and sweet as ever.

They stared at each other for a moment, before Mike broke the silence. "And I'm here too!" He grinned.

Will and Troy both blushed, and Jonathan, Nancy, and Steve looked between them both with obvious interest.

"Hello!" Everyone turned, and there stood El, who gave a small wave. "I am ready to buy a pretty dress!" She pulled out the wad of cash Troy had returned and pressed it into Nancy's hands. "Hold this for me, please?"

She then skipped out of the house to the car. Everyone watched her go, all with matching confused expressions. Laughing, Mike shrugged and skipped out after her. Dumbfounded, Jonathan, Nancy, and Steve just stared at each other. Will grinned, happy El was applying the skills he had taught her. He turned to Troy, and mustering his courage, said, "Shall we?" and skipped out after Mike and El, hoping Troy would follow him.

Troy did without hesitation, but since he was a grumpy bean he did not skip. He watched Will and smiled softly to himself though.

Jonathan and Steve gave up and skipped to the car too, but Nancy ran, screaming about how she was going to beat them because of girl power. **(Spoilers: She beat them. Because she is badass. The end.)**

All out by the car, Nancy and Will forced Mike to leave, both insisting he couldn't see the dress El picked until the night of the dance. Finally, he caved and rode his bike home, while Jonathan, Steve, Nancy, Will, Troy, and El piled into Jonathan's car to drive to Macy's **(Author's Note: Idk if they have a Macy's, but I'm saying they do, because it's better than saying they drove to the dress shop.)** To fit, Jonathan drove, Nancy sat shotgun, Steve sat behind Jonathan, El sat in the center, and Will sat on Troy's lap, double-buckle style **(Author's Note: This is a bad idea! When driving, drive responsibly (and sit responsibly)! This is only in the story cuz they all needed to fit in the car and, also, let's face it, it pretty fucking cute).**

Will and Troy complained, blushing furiously, but Steve insisted it was the safest option considering their circumstances. Still complaining, Will sat in Troy's lap, and blushed even redder when Troy had to reach over his lap so he could buckle them up. Halfway through the drive there, Troy wrapped his arms around Will like a second seatbelt, insisting it was more comfortable that way. After a few minutes of feeble resistance, Will agreed and allowed Troy to hug him against his chest.

Troy's face was right behind Will's and Troy could smell Will's shampoo, a pleasant minty sort of scent. Troy liked it, and he liked how warm Will was against him. His stomach was fluttering at this close contact, and Troy prayed that Jonathan would drive slowly.

Troy turned his head to look out the window, but accidentally caught the eye of his brother, who sent him a suggestive wink.

Sputtering, Troy turned away, cheeks burning.

But he never didn't let go of Will.

Author's Note: Y'all, I'm such a slut for Will x Troy. This is so cute and so fun to write. Hope you enjoyed this chapter, and tell me what you thought!

Also: MAY MY COMPUTER BURN IN HELL :))))

Kisses,

Chattré

25. Chapter 19

Author's Note: Hi y'all! Just wanted to let you know that this is up on A03 too, and a few of you have noticed and notified me, which I appreciate. My user is the same if you want to check it out: chattrekisses. Thanks for all the support my lovely nerdy children!

So they were dressing shopping.

That was a thing.

Apparently, so was flirting with Will, and Troy wasn't complaining. His face was, from it's untoward amount of blushing, but otherwise, Troy felt... well, there wasn't really a word for it. He flipped through more dresses, rubbing the silky fabric between his thumb and forefinger carefully. The feeling of Will actually responding to his without being disgusted was electric. The feeling of Will accidentally brushing his elbow and not apologizing, but maintaining eye contact just a moment too long was doing strange things to Troy. He felt like his stomach was carbonated, bubbly and threatening to take him over with happiness. He-

"Sparkly." Came a voice by Troy's right ear, surprising him and nearly making him jump out of his skin. It was El, carrying a mountain of ridiculous gaudy and sequined dresses. She held them up for him to inspect. "These are sparkly." Troy waited a moment, but El was still offering the dresses to him, so he reluctantly took them.

"Um... yeah. These certainly *are* sparkly, El." He said. And they were, they caught the light and reflected it, and Troy felt like he was carrying a disco ball. "Are you planning on trying them on?"

El wrinkled her nose. "No."

Troy's eyebrows creased. "Then why the hell would you give 'em to me?" He asked, but not unkindly. His speech still had mannerisms typically geared towards being mean, but El bypassed his blip in kindness with ease.

She poked him in the chest and said, "You are feeling sparkly, right? These are sparkly too, like you."

"Sparkly?" Troy asked in confusion.

"Sparkly." El confirmed. She then pointed to his stomach. "You feel sparkly here, right? When you talk to Will? It's like how I feel when I talk to Mike."

Though El was right, Troy winced, not at her words, but her volume. He spent a solid minute looking around and making sure Will was in earshot. He finally spotted Will by the shoes, tapping each heel against the palm of his hand, seemingly trying to see which one was the pointiest.

"I do feel sparkly," Troy said, voice hushed, face red. "But you can't tell him, okay?"

"Okay." El hummed. She tapped the sparkly dresses. "You should ask him to the Snow Ball."

"Oh, my god, I couldn't do that. I could *not* do that. That would be... no. He wouldn't say yes, and even if he did, then everyone would know!" Troy bumbled.

"Know what?" El asked, tipping her head to the side.

"That I..." He dropped his voice lower, to a whisper. "That I like boys."

El shrugged. "Why do you care what they think?"

Troy opened his mouth to respond, but he didn't have an answer.

El hummed knowingly, and then started to walk away. "You should talk to him."

And then she disappeared in the racks of clothes.

"Jesus." Troy cursed and frowned at the pile of sparkly dresses in his arms. His eyebrows furrowed and he huffed, dropping the dresses in the middle of the aisle, then gingerly stepping over them. He was not

going to be seen with those sparkly monstrosities a moment longer. He then sucked in a breath, and huffed, stomping over to Will.

He came up behind Will, hands fisted in his pockets, breath shallow with nervousness. "Hey." He said.

Will jumped at the unexpected voice and spun around, face-to-face with Troy. "Oh! Hi!" Will held up a pastel purple pump with a good six-inch heel for Troy to inspect. "These are ridiculous, aren't they? How can anyone walk in them? They're like... like... um..."

"Stilts?" Troy offered, taking the shoe from Will. Sparks of electricity shot through Troy where his fingers brushed Will's.

"Yeah! Stilts. They're like stilts." Will grinned at Troy, and Troy ducked his head, blushing hard. He stared pointedly at the shoe.

"If El wore these, she could stab anybody who tried to mess with her. She'd be freaking dangerous." Troy said.

"El's already dangerous." Will said with a brisk smile.

Troy's eyebrows drew together. "What?"

"You know that though. She apologized for breaking your arm, right?" Will asked. He tapped his lip thoughtfully. "I'm pretty sure I was supposed to remind her to do that... did I remind her?"

"Wait, what?" Troy stiffened, eyes wild. "That was El?"

"Yeah... did she not apologize? I'm sure she just forgot too, I'll remind her-" Will started, but Troy cut him off.

"It all makes sense now! Jesus. Wow. Okay then." Troy ground the toe of his shoe into the floor. "I deserved it anyway." He blew out a sigh, feeling like he might cry. "God, I've been such an asshole..."

Will's voice went soft and he laid a hand on Troy's arm. "Hey, it's okay. We've all done bad things, but that doesn't make us bad people. You aren't a bad person, Troy. You're trying, and that's what matters."

Troy tried to suppress the hope bubbling in his chest, but he couldn't

help it, the feeling - *sparkly*, like El said- was consuming him. "Are you going to the Snow Ball?" Troy asked, his words rushing and tumbling over one another nervously.

"Hmm?" Will look up in mild shock, like he hadn't been expecting the question and he didn't know what to think or say. "Um... I... I don't know. I wasn't planning to, but maybe? I was going to watch Star Wars but..." Will spotted the deflating expression on Troy's face and quickly amended. "I wouldn't be opposed to going! I just don't know who I would go with..."

"Um... would you maybe want to..." Troy mumbled, looking down at the floor. He felt the anxiety fizz in his chest. "Go in a group or something? With Lucas and Dustin?" He winced, terrified and angry at himself for wimping out and not just *asking* him, but still frightened of Will's answer.

A smile crept across Will's face. "Okay."

"Yeah?" Troy said, trying to contain his happiness.

"Yeah." Will confirmed. "I'll ask Lucas and Dustin about it tonight, okay? How can I... contact you, I guess? Do you have a phone or a-"

"I have a walkie-talkie... it's a supercom." Troy rubbed the back of his neck in embarrassment, cheeks pinking. "I know it's kind of dorky..."

"I have one too!" Will grinned. "We all do, actually. Tune into channel six, and I'll let you know, okay?"

"Great!" Troy said, rocking back and forth on his heels. "I'm excited." He confessed.

"I'm kind of nervous." Will said, pulling a dress from a rack near them. "I've never been to a dance before." He scrutinized the pink dress. It was satin-y and had a scalloped hem. "Do you think El would like this one?"

"You've never been to a dance before?" Troy asked. He eyed the dress and shrugged. "I don't know much about dresses. Maybe we should just show her?"

"Okay." Will said, carefully draping the dress over his arm. "I've just never felt the need to go. It doesn't seem that fun." He realized his words and quickly amended. "It doesn't seem fun *if* you don't have anyone to go with, and I'm going with you, and Lucas and Dustin, so..." His voice trailed off and his shoulders pulled up towards his ears. "I don't know."

"I think it'll be fun. I hope it'll be fun." Troy said. He was scared, terrified really of what people might say or how they might react to seeing him go to a dance with Will, Lucas, and Dustin. That in itself would rock the boat, but what if people knew that Troy had wanted to go just with Will? What if they knew he wanted to go with Will because he liked Will? *Romantically?*

The boat wouldn't rock, it'd flip clean over.

"If it gets weird, we can hide outside." Troy offered. "Or we could bike home."

"Maybe we could watch Star Wars at Mike's after!" Will said, and Troy could hear the excitement building in his voice. "He has the best TV."

"I've never actually seen Star Wars." Troy admitted.

"What?" Will asked, looking personally affronted by the information. "That's ridiculous. It's a classic. We have to watch it. We'll watch it after the dance, at Mike's."

"Yeah?" Troy asked. He was so damn hopeful, finally having the opportunity to have friends, maybe, a crush, maybe, all the maybe's were swirling up inside Troy. He was sickeningly happy.

"Yeah." Will smiled, like the ray of sunshine he was, and awkwardly patted Troy on the shoulder, sending a bolt of electricity through the other boy. "Come on, let's show the dress to El."

"Okay." Troy replied, and they went off, searching for El. They found her by the changing room, holding a pile of pink dresses. When she saw the one Will was holding though, she dropped the pile. Luckily, Troy had been expecting this, and he caught them before they hit the

floor. El said nothing, just took the dress from Will with a smile, and disappeared into the changing room. Troy and Will tapped their feet anxiously, stealing glances at each other while they waited for El to come out.

When she finally did, they knew that it was the perfect dress for her. Satin and pink, with thick straps and a scalloped bodice with a matching scalloped hem.

"Perfect." Was all El said.

And perfect it was.

Nancy was off looking for shoes for El, so Jonathan and Steve stood together, observing Troy and Will talking and blushing together.

Steve grinned and ran a hand through his perfectly coiffed hair. "I think my brother likes your brother."

Jonathan tilted his head, watching the two of them with casual interest. Obviously, Troy was interested in Will. He was bright red and sputtering half the time, and Will didn't seem to mind. In fact, Will seemed to be receptive to Troy's clumsy advances, which was a little shocking to Jonathan. He thought that Will liked Mike, but from Will's ease and subtle flirtation with Troy, Jonathan inferred that Will must not like Mike anymore. Jonathan trusted his brother, and he knew that Will would never lead anyone on (honestly, he probably wasn't even capable of the notion of doing that), so he must actually be interested in Troy.

Will was much more comfortable around Troy than he was around Mike when he had liked him. He also seemed happier, brighter somehow, and Jonathan was happy to see his brother happy.

"I think that my brother likes your brother." He answered, and he wasn't lying.

"Good." Steve said. "They both deserve something good in their lives."

Jonathan nodded, and then turned to Steve. "We're friends, right?"

A smile crept over Steve's face, slow and honest. "I hope so."

"Good." Jonathan said. "We deserve something good in our lives, too."

"You already have something good in your life." Steve pointed out.
"Nancy."

"Yeah." Jonathan smiled and shifted, happiness bubbling inside of him. "Well, then you deserve something good in your life."

"Really?" Steve asked.

"Really."

And everything was alright.

Author's Note: CHILDREN! Hullo. Hope you enjoyed, sorry it took so long, sorry it's so short, check out my Stranger Things insta (strangerschnapple) and my Riverdale insta (bettycoope.r), and my other platforms this is on (A03, Wattpad, and), yada yada, self-promo, yada yada, I love you all, yada yada.

26. Chapter 20

Author's Note: CHILDREN through months of trials and terror, hospitalization and raging, delightful depression, I have emerged semi-victorious with a new chapter. I hope you enjoy it, and I want to thank you deeply for the lovely messages you sent me about this work. I love you all. If you want to talk to me (praise me, stroke my ego pls I am sad and weak and need constant love and affection, then DM on Instagram **strangerschnapple** and we can become the snazziest of friends)

"ELEVEN! ELEVEN, WHERE ARE YOU? ELEVEN?" Nancy screamed.

Mike winced at the words. Even though Mike knew that El was there with him, literally, right there, holding his hand, it reminded him too much of when El was gone. El smiled at Mike and kissed him quickly on the cheek. "She wants me to get ready for the dance." El said.

The dance. Mike felt all giddy at the word. It was at eight o'clock tonight, and Mike couldn't wait to go and to see El in her *dress*. It was going to be great.

"WE'RE IN THE BASEMENT!" Mike shouted at Nancy.

"COMING!" She returned. Mike listened as he heard his older sister's footsteps pound down the stairs. When Nancy came into view, she raised an eyebrow at the two of them cuddled up together.

"Mike! You aren't supposed to be here!" Nancy said, exasperated.

"Uh... I live here." Mike said.

Nancy huffed. "Oh my god, Mike. You know what I mean. You're supposed to be at the Byers' with the rest of the boys getting ready!"

"Nancy, the dance is in four hours." Mike said, squeezing El's hand tighter. In reality, he knew he really should be leaving and getting ready, but he wanted to stay here with El. *His girlfriend*. He grinned at the title.

"Exactly!" Nancy exclaimed. "Time's a-wasting! Where is Jonathan?"

She asked.

"Shouldn't you know? He's *your* boyfriend." Mike said.

A small smile crept over Nancy's features. "Yeah. Yeah, he is," She realized she was spacing out, and snapped out of her stupor. "But that is not the point! The point is, he's late!"

Nancy was cut off by someone ringing the doorbell frantically. Nancy broke into a grin. "That'll be Jonathan. C'mon you two!"

Mike stood, still holding El's hand, and they followed Nancy up the stairs to the front door, where the person behind it was continuing to ring the doorbell profusely. Nancy frowned in annoyance at the sheer amount of high-pitched dinging noises that were running through the air. She flung open the door and there Jonathan and Will stood, Jonathan frantically pressing the doorbell.

Jonathan winced as soon as he say Nancy. "Ah! I'm so, so, so sorry that we're late—" Jonathan started, but Nancy silenced him with a kiss.

Will took one look and fake-gagged.

"Hi Will!" El chirped, bypassing the kissing couple with ease to reach around and give Will a hug.

"Hey sis," Will smiled. "Hey Mike. Ready to go?"

"Yeah." Mike said. He leaned over and kissed El on the cheek chastely. "See you later, El!"

"Bye, El!" Will chirped, giving his sister a quick hug.

El waved at the three of them, her boyfriend and her brothers, as they walked away. She felt content, more at peace then she had been in a very long time.

"Are you excited?" Nancy whispered.

El grinned. "Yes."

"Want to go get ready?" Nancy asked, her excitement bubbling into

her tone. Finally Nancy would be able to satisfy her makeover craving on someone other than her unwilling brother (She was twelve, he was seven, there was more rhinestones and blue eyeshadow involved than Nancy had planned).

"Yes." El replied.

"Okay then. Let's go!" Nancy cheered, grabbing El's hand and dragging her towards her room.

(line break)

Jonathan drove quickly yet carefully, nodding his head along to The Clash and occasionally glancing back at his brother and Mike. It was silent, but it was an energetic, comfortable silence. Like they were anticipating something.

"So," Jonathan said. He didn't like silences, anticipatory or not. "Dustin and Lucas will be at the house soon, and Steve is bringing Troy right before we head over to Nancy's. That sound good?"

Mike turned to Will. "Did you tell Lucas and Dustin about Troy coming with us?"

Will paled. "Oh. I... no. I didn't."

"Why?" Mike asked. "That's not really something I'd recommend springing on them," Mike noticed Will's distressed expression and quickly amended himself. "But that is completely your decision."

"I don't know, Mike, I..." Will shook his head and swallowed. "I'll tell them. Can we change the subject?"

"Sure." Mike said. "Hey, will you at least tell me what color El's dress is?"

"No," Will stated firmly. "I will not. Reason one, your sister will have my head if I tell you. Reason two, it's better to be surprised sometimes."

"I hate surprises." Mike muttered.

"No, you don't. You just hate *bad* surprises." Will said.

"Well, that's true." Mike smiled at Will, and Will smiled back.

They continued the rest of the car ride discussing little, trivial things, like whether or not it would actually snow for the Snow Ball. It was nice, not having to worry about monsters or bad men or anything else anymore.

"Where have you been!" A voice screamed as they pulled into the Byers' driveway. Jonathan bristled, nearly running into a tree, but he managed to park unscathed.

Jonathan popped open the driver's seat door and frowned at Dustin and Lucas. "Don't yell when someone is driving." He tried to sound as sullen and grumpy as possible, but it didn't really end up working.

"We've been waiting for ten minutes in the cold." Lucas huffed.

"You two sound like an old married couple." Will grinned, sliding out of the car.

Lucas frowned, but Dustin conceded with a snort. "We kind of do."

"Shut up." Lucas waved away the notion with a flick of his wrist. He then smiled, and followed Jonathan toward the door.

"So..." Jonathan said. "Anyone nervous?"

Will shifted, eyeing Lucas and Dustin anxiously. "Yeah. Yeah, a bit."

"Why? You're going stag with us, aren't you?" Dustin laughed, ruffling Will's hair fondly. "It'll be a blast! We can make fun of Mike for going with a *date*!" His voice raised at the end and tumbled into a laugh, clearly delighted by Mike having a date and the opportunity to make fun of him for it.

Will rubbed his arm and looking down at his feet. "Actually, I do have a date. Sort of."

Dustin's laugh died off. "What? Seriously?" He and Lucas grinned at Will, pride in their eyes. "That's great, Will! Who is it?"

"Oh. Um." Will swallowed and looked up with his big, brown doe eyes. "Just... don't freak out, okay?"

Lucas's eyebrow's furrowed suspiciously. "Okay..."

"I'm going... I'm going with Troy." Will said, timidly and wincing, as if afraid they would completely reject him because of this information.

Lucas's eyes blew wide in shock. "What?" He asked, not angrily, but slightly confused and very blind-sighted.

"Huh." Dustin nodded. "Okay," He nodded more vigorously now, digesting the information. "Okay. Okay. Is he good to you?"

Will smiled, a little dreamily. "He is. He's trying, you know? He wants to be good. He wants to be a better person. I want to help him."

"Huh." Dustin repeated. "Okay."

"Did you ask him, or did he ask you?" Lucas asked.

"He asked me." Will said. "It's a group thing, of course."

"With what group?" Lucas asked, mouth quirking.

"Oh! Um... I was hoping with you and Dustin. Is that okay?" Will asked. "Sorry, I forgot to ask earlier."

"It's okay! And yes, we'd be honored to be the chaperones on your date." Dustin laughed.

Lucas frowned. "I can't believe you won."

Will balked. "Uh... what?"

"Not you," Lucas said. "Dustin. He won our bet. Now I have to give him the X-men comic."

"Wait, what? What bet?" Mike asked, eyebrows furrowed.

Lucas folded his arms grumpily and Dustin grinned. "We had a bet. I said that Troy would ask you to the Snowball, and Lucas thought he'd be too chicken." Dustin poked Lucas's arm teasingly. "Now he's mad

'cause he lost."

"You knew?" Mike asked, eyes wide.

"How could you have guessed that?" Will asked, voice loud with shock.

Dustin and Lucas stilled. Together they said, "We know all things." Their voices were eerie and hollow. Then stayed still for a moment longer before dissolving into giggles.

Jonathan shivered. "You two are fucking creepy, you know that? Like twins from a horror movie." He muttered as he unlocked the door.

"Thanks!" Dustin chirped as he followed Jonathan into the house.

"How did you know? For real?" Will asked Lucas.

"That's not our secret to tell." Lucas replied. He switched the bag from his right shoulder to his left. "Dustin! Get your suit!" He said, holding open his bag.

Dustin pouted. "Do I have to?" He whined. "Suits are so uncomfortable."

"Yes. Now get this damn thing, it's heavy." Dustin stomped over petulantly and pulled out the suits, which was normal except for his vest, which was plaid.

"What is *that*?" Mike asked, pointing at the offensive fabric. "It's *hideous*."

"It's plaid." Dustin deadpanned.

"But *why*?" Will asked.

"Because I like it, that's why!" Dustin said with an amused frown. "Now get off my back about it, okay? Lucas's suits has flowers on it!"

Mike and Will eyed Lucas in disbelief.

"And I look fabulous in it, so fuck off." Lucas grinned, holding up his

floral suit jacket.

"Yeah, sure, whatever," Mike frowned. "Are Will and I the only ones who dressed... I don't know... *sanely*?"

"Shut up, Mike," Lucas and Dustin chorused.

The four of them exchanged glances and collapsed into giggles, a warm sense of comradery settling over them. Despite all they had been through, they were there for each other no matter what, and that was all that mattered.

(line break)

"Oh, El, you look so pretty!" Nancy cooed, gesturing for El to give her a twirl. El complied and the frosted pink of her dress swirled around her.

"Really?" El asked with a smile.

"Really! Mike's a lucky guy." Nancy answered. "Okay, okay, sit, sit! Let me do your makeup!"

El sat hesitantly on the chair on Nancy's vanity, and Nancy knelt in front of her, turning to rumble through the products that lined her vanity. Nancy approached El with a brush loaded with some sort of powder, and El flinched away from the onslaught of product.

"Mike did this last time," El said.

Nancy sighed light-heartedly. "Well, I promise you I will make you look significantly less clown-like than he most likely did." She noticed El's expression and continued. "Only if you feel comfortable, of course."

El bit her lip and steeled herself. "It's okay. Go ahead."

Nancy approached her with the brush again, slower this time, as not to frighten the girl. El felt her nerves tingle as the brush danced over her skin.

"What does that do?" She asked.

"It's powder, so it evens your tone." Nancy said. She dipped the brush into something pink and then swirled the brush on El's cheekbones. "And this is blush, and it makes you nice and rosy."

Nancy shuffled around and pulled out a tube of sticky liquid. "Lipgloss," She explained. "Can you pucker your lips for me?" El complied, and Nancy swiped the gloss across her lips. Nancy put the lipgloss back and returned with another tube, this one black. "This is mascara. Can you open your eyes *really* wide?"

El opened her eyes. "That looks like a caterpillar." She commented.

Nancy inspected the mascara wand. "I suppose it does." She coated El's eyes quickly, and El tried her hardest not to flinch. This was odd, but she liked being with Nancy. It made her feel cared for, and that was quite precious to her.

"Thank you," El whispered with a small smile.

Nancy's features melted into a small smile. "Of course, El." They both stood, and Nancy spun in a happy circle. "Alright, El. Time to get your shoes on. You have a ball to attend!"

(line break)

"I think he's here!" Will whispered, poking Mike. "What do I do?"

"I mean," Mike stopped his train of thought to adjust his tie. "You could get the door." He suggested.

"Oh, gosh, no," Will paled. "I can't- I can't do that!"

Mike made a face. "Uh... okay... Dustin! Can you get the door?"

"Sure!" Dustin replied. He ran to the door, skidding across the wood floor in his socked-feet. He threw open the door to find Troy in a suit, looking uncomfortable and stuffy. "Well, hello there."

Troy swallowed. "Hi," He shifted a bit on his feet. "Um... I- uh... I want to apologize. I've been a really shitty person, and I know that you got the brunt of it, and I'm really sorry."

"Huh," Dustin smiled slowly. "I accept your apology. Now, come in or you'll freeze your ass off."

Troy stilled. "That's... that's it?"

Dustin grinned. "Were you expecting it to be harder? I'm in the business of making friends. Now, seriously, come in. I don't understand why a Snowball requires *literal snow* to fall from the sky..."

Troy, shivering a bit from the cold, entered the building, his brother following behind him.

"Hey, Troy," Mike said, still facing the mirror and trying to fix his tie. It sat in a rather tangled looking knot at the center of his chest. "Shit," He muttered. "Stupid tie."

Lucas nodded at him from the couch, pulling on his shoes. "How cold is it out there?"

Troy smiled. "Fuckin' freezing,"

Will peeked from around a door and broke into a grin. "Oh, hey, Troy! Didn't know you already gotten here, hi!"

The entire statement was so painfully awkward that it was obvious that Will had been aware that Troy was there.

Still, Troy blushed. "Hey, Will."

Will bounded up to him, his cheeks coloring too. "You have snowflakes in your eyelashes," He observed. "Here." He leaned forward and gently brushed them out of Troy's dark eyelashes.

Dustin clucked. "Adorable!"

They both turned to him, faces red, as if they had been caught with their hands in a cookie jar.

Mike saved them from embarrassment by changing the subject, "If Troy's here, shouldn't we go to pick up El?"

"Can't keep your lady waiting," Dustin grinned, nudging Mike as he grabbed his coat. He then frowned, making a face at Mike's tie. "That... looks horrible. Are you trying to tie a noose?"

"*Are you trying to tie a noose?*" Mike grumbled petulantly, ripping off the tangled tie. "I'm ditching this," He held the offending piece of cloth up, inspecting it harshly, then dropping it on the ground. "Let's go, everyone."

(line break)

Mike was dating a princess.

Practically.

Or at least, that's what it felt like when he saw El glide down the stairs in an iced pink dress.

He felt the awe-struck, "Wow," pass through his lips, ignoring the snickers of the boys behind him. El looked... heart-stoppingly gorgeous as she descended the staircase.

"She looks so good!" Nancy squealed with glee. "And it's all because of my handiwork, so you better thank me, Mike."

"I think that she looks perfect regardless," Mike said, feeling himself glide over to where El stood at the bottom of the stairs and taking her hand.

"Pretty?" El asked tentatively, smoothing her free hand over her pink skirt.

"Beautiful," Mike smiled, leaning in to peck her on the cheek. Behind him, Lucas and Dustin made matching gagging noises, but he ignored them as he kissed her.

They both blushed deeply, and it was all adorable and picturesque, as expected.

"Mike, did you remember to buy a corsage?" Nancy asked.

Mike's eyebrows furrowed. "A what?"

"A corsage!" Nancy said. "The flowers, dumbass."

"Um..."

"You were supposed to buy one to match the boutonniere!"

"Bless you."

"Mike!"

"It's okay," El said, her voice clipped yet soothing. She walked over to Nancy and took the boutonniere from her. It was a pretty sprig of flowers, two roses with baby's breath laced between them. Carefully, El separated the roses and baby's breath, handing half to Mike and keeping half for herself. She tucked her half behind her ear, and Mike followed suit. "Problem solved."

Nancy tried to grimace more, but she had to admit that it was kind of adorable. "Ugh, lovebirds. Go on, have fun at the dance."

Mike grinned at Nancy, squeezing El's hand tight. "Don't worry, we will."

Author's Note: Don't worry, there is more to come, my dearies. In the meantime, check out my Reddie fics on Archive of Our Own aka the fabulous AO3 or DM on strangerschnapple on Instagram and we can chat about how obnoxious my absence was. Love you guys!